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JS Bach • Schumann • Shaw

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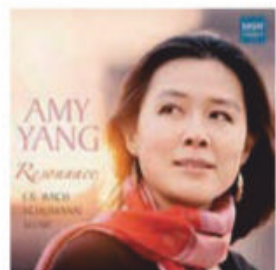
JS Bach Keyboard Partita No 4, BWV828

Schumann Davidsbündlertänze, Op 6

Shaw Gustave Le Gray

Amy Yang *pf*

MSR Classics © MS1655 (76' • DDD)



On paper, the idea of Bach's Fourth Partita and Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze*

bookending the recorded premiere of Caroline Shaw's 14-minute *Gustave Le Gray* might seem bizarre. In reality, the programme concept is absolutely inspired, for each of these three works, though stylistically divergent, embodies wide contrasts of mood.

Since Shaw's piece is new to disc, it makes sense to discuss it first. The composer sets off on her 'multi-layered portrait' of Chopin's A minor Mazurka, Op 17 No 4, with soft repeated chords that eventually grow louder and more petulant. Chopin's Mazurka rears its head at the 3'38" mark and, at around nine minutes, Chopin's original harmonies commence a process of unhinging and the piece more or less ends the way it begins. Shaw wrote *Gustave Le Gray* for Amy Yang, who presumably plays it to the composer's satisfaction, although wilder contrasts of tempo and dynamics might give the music a terser and edgier profile.

Surely the performance would have gained from the fervency and audacity that Yang brings to her Bach. The Overture's introduction comes to vivid life through Yang's coiled freedom and deft ornaments, and she charges through the central section like an unbridled puppy, albeit one who is paper-trained! Her lily-gilded Allemande would cause Rosalyn Tureck to turn in her grave, yet it made me smile. However, the breezy Courante borders on glib (the perfunctory up-beats are a giveaway), while little hesitations and holdbacks diffuse the Menuet's basic pulse.

If anything, Yang's freedom reaches epic proportions throughout the Schumann, yet

it is undermined by the pianist's comparable lack of tonal heft and sustaining power; at least that's what the clear yet somewhat drab sonic image suggests. Still, the music readily absorbs Yang's subjective touches, such as the endless pause following the first movement's introductory measures, No 9's fanciful fermatas, No 14's feathery *cantabile* and No 17's assiduous build to the end. Perhaps her big ideas translate into even bigger, juicier pianism live in concert; I'd love to find out. Yang, Shaw and composer/pianist Curt Cacioppo all contribute annotations that alternate between the poetic, the evocative and the just plain wackadoodle. **Jed Distler**

Maslanka

O Earth, O Stars^a. Symphony No 10, 'The River of Time' (compl M Maslanka)

^aJohn McMurtery fl ^aMoisés Molina vc **Western Illinois University Wind Ensemble / Mike Fansler**
Navona © NV6261 (76' • DDD)



When David Maslanka died on August 7, 2017, barely five weeks after his wife and three weeks shy of his 74th birthday, America lost one of its warmest-hearted and most prolific composers. He was especially active in music for wind ensembles; indeed, eight of his 10 symphonies were for concert bands, including the last, left incomplete at his death. At the composer's expressed request his son, Matthew, produced this performing version, here receiving its second recording. (The first was made by the University of Utah Wind Ensemble, who premiered the symphony in 2018.)

At 40 minutes in length, the Tenth Symphony is a major utterance, yet something of a family affair, too. The opening 'Alison' (the only movement completed by the composer) is a double portrait of Maslanka's dying wife and his anger at her condition. The sense of impending loss is developed further in the finale, 'One Breath in Peace', which resolves on to a Bach chorale (sung by the

band's pianist; Maslanka's morning routine was to play and sing Bach chorales at the piano). The second movement, 'Mother and Boy Watching the River of Time' (of which the full score was half-finished at his death), and finale were fully sketched by Maslanka but the third – the work's heart – was in very fragmentary form. Matthew Maslanka has done a remarkable job deciphering the sketches and producing a viable – if overlong – movement. It may not be, indeed, 'what Dad would have written' but is of a piece with the rest. Titled 'David', the third movement is a collaborative work, a portrait of a family united in grief and love.

The coupling is of almost equal duration, the suite-cum-double concerto for flute, cello and concert band *O Earth, O Stars* (2010). It is also rooted in one of Bach's chorales ('Jesu, meine Freude'), though its six movements embrace material and inspiration from Buddhist imagery, Jung and AA Milne! It is an attractive and well-written work, beautifully played here by John McMurtery and Moisés Molina. The Western Illinois University Wind Ensemble, directed impressively by Mike Fansler, accompany superbly and their interpretation of the symphony is as affecting as their Utah rivals (Mark Records). Navona's sound is warm and clear. **Guy Rickards**

Symphony No 10 – comparative version:

U of Utah Wind Ens, Hagen (MARK) 54044MCD

Reale

'Caldera with Ice Cave – Music for Strings' American Elegy^a. Concerto grosso^a. Dancer's Dream^a. Hextet^b. Piano Concerto No 3, 'Caldera with Ice Cave'^c

^cChristopher Guzman *pf* **Lynn Philharmonia /**
^aGuillermo Figueroa, ^{bc}Jon Robertson
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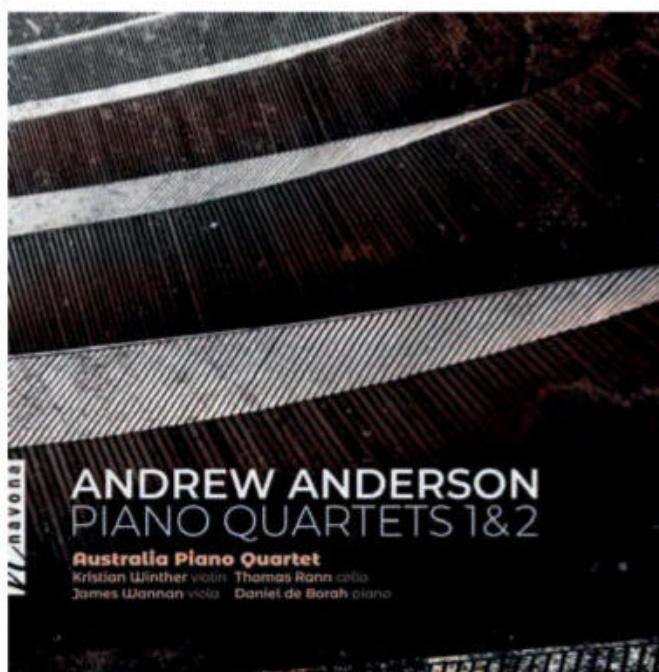


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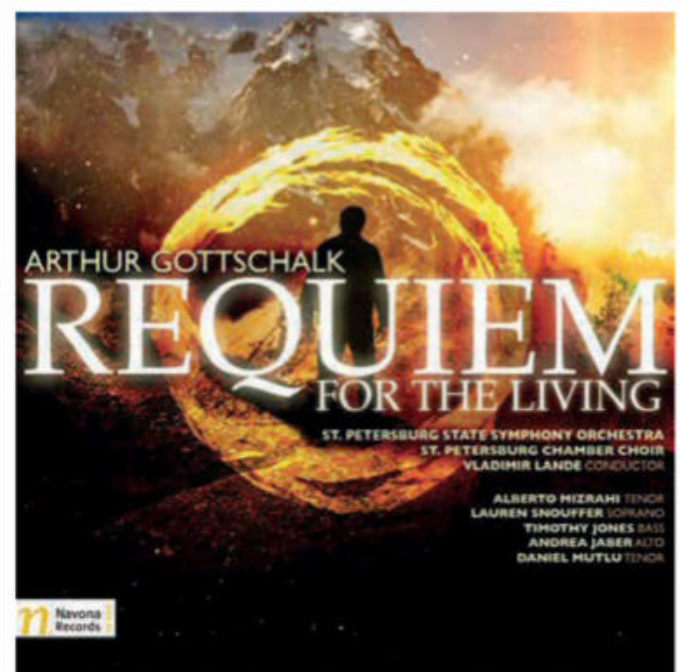
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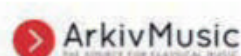
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Jon Robertson and the Lynn Philharmonia recording the music of Paul Reale for MSR Classics

ideas are so excellent you wonder why no other composer ever thought of them before, like assigning different solo string instruments for each movement of his *Concerto grosso*, which itself is a brilliant baroque-minded take on the Romantic colourist composers. Reale draws on the past of American music in his earnest, consoling homage to Samuel Barber, *American Elegy*, played twice, the second time in his 2018 version with chimes – annoying at first, although towards the end it seemed ritualistically right.

Reale's confection for Halloween, *Hextet*, begins with a 'Tarantella' through which a 'Greensleeves' tune runs, interrupted by angular outbursts. Although the composer claims in his booklet notes that his 'Zombies' movement is 'creepy', it is actually lovely, featuring an exquisite cello solo. A hymn emerges halfway through 'Walpurgisnacht'. 'I like to think of it as a sound movie', writes Reale. In the same general vein, Reale's surrealistic cornucopia of sounds, *Dancer's Dream*, climaxes magically in many different directions at the same time.

His Piano Concerto No 3, *Caldera with Ice Cave*, is full of musical wonder at the natural wonders of northern New Mexico. Although it opens as if it were going to be the greatest Romantic piano concerto of all

time, it proceeds born out of admiration for *Harold in Italy* and *Don Quixote*. Reale's use of a piano trio in the 'Fire' movement recalls the Concerto *Dies irae* he wrote for the Mirecourt Trio 40 years earlier.

Laurence Vittes

'A Black Birch in Winter'

'American and Estonian Choral Music'

GW Brown A Black Birch in Winter. The Fabric

of Streams. Then **M Kõrvits** Mina see olin.

Gran piant' agli ochi **Seppar** Near. Sirelite aegu

K Smith Where Flames a Word **Uusberg**

Kodumaa laulud

Voces Musicales / David Puderbaugh

MSR Classics © MS1675 (57) • DDD • T/t



currently available in Presto Classical's database is a well-received programme of music by Arvo Pärt, described as 'recent' in the booklet but issued in 2010! The smoothly manicured sound evident on that earlier release (ERP, 12/10) recurs here, the 24 singers producing a richly blended, beautifully balanced sound, undeniably appealing to all but the most

jaded of ears. If they have a fault, it is that their refinement tends to overshadow everything they sing.

All nine works, by Estonian and American composers, are premiere recordings. Kile Smith's triptych *Where Flames a Word* (2004), setting texts by Paul Celan, is the oldest. Its central panel, 'Conversation in the Mountains', dominates to such an extent that the brief finale feels more like a coda than a separate movement. Pärt Uusberg's *Kodumaa laulud* ('Homeland Songs', 2015) is more consistently balanced in that respect, a paean to Estonia's natural beauty experienced through Ellen Niit's poems. Evelin Seppar likes to set texts in English; *Near* (2012) uses extracts from five Elizabeth Barrett Browning sonnets – listen to the impressive opening on the word 'How' – while *Sirelite aegu* ('At the lilacs' hour', 2016) sets two Estonian poets in translation.

Gregory W Brown – best known for being the brother of novelist Dan Brown and the composer of the *Missa Charles Darwin* – provides three recent works from 2014-15, including the title-track, *A Black Birch in Winter*. All three, like Uusberg's, were inspired by writings about nature and landscape, including seasonal changes (*Then*) or the flow of elements (*The Fabric of Streams*). However, it is the final pair of

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Pictured: Violinist Janine Jansen (DECCA / © Marco Borggreve) who featured on the January 2016 cover of Gramophone. Full annual retail price for print only (13 issues) is \$142.87; print only annual subscription or Digital Edition or Reviews Database (\$101); Digital Club (\$134); Gramophone Club (\$167). If choosing a print option, an addition overseas P+P charge will be added at \$35.75 (Outside EU). If you have a subscription enquiry then please email subscriptions@markallengroup.com



settings by Marina Kōrvits that linger longest in the memory, dreamlike depictions of human interactions. Fine sound, fascinating disc, but it lacks a standout, truly fast-paced item for maximum contrast. **Guy Rickards**

'Inspirations'

Dvořák String Quartet No 12, 'American', Op 96 B179 (arr Vallières) **Ewald** Brass Quintet No 3, Op 7 **Ravel** String Quartet - 2nd movt (arr Vallières) **Satie** Gymnopédies (arr Bégin) - No 1; No 3

Buzz Brass

Analekta © AN2 8776 (56' • DDD)



Buzz Brass's previous recordings have included a version of *The Planets* for an expanded ensemble including organ and 'Preludes and Rhapsodies', featuring pianist

Matt Herskowitz in a barnstorming rendition of *Rhapsody in Blue* and harpist Valérie Milot in Debussy's *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune* (both discs on Fidelio Musique). Here the focus is on the core ensemble of two trumpets, horn, tenor and bass trombone – the last-named providing a warmer tone to the ensemble's sound.

They open with Victor Ewald's Third Brass Quintet, thought to be his last, written c1912. (The dating of Ewald's works is not precise: No 4, Op 8, was actually the first to be written, in the 1880s, but declared unplayable and reworked as his String Quartet, Op 1.) Like Nos 1 and 2, the Third is much recorded, but Buzz Brass's rendition can stand comparison with any of their competitors and choice will come down to couplings. (Stockholm Chamber Brass, on BIS, are unusual in coupling all four together.) Buzz Brass are totally at home in Ewald's quietly late-Romantic idiom,

relishing the lyricism of the slower central movements as much as the lively *Vivo* finale in what is a very well-rounded account.

The remainder of the programme consists of arrangements. That of the Scherzo of Ravel's F major Quartet is jaw-droppingly brilliant – a testament to the ensemble's sensational embouchure – and almost convinces that the music was conceived for brass. The finest music on the programme comes from another F major quartet, this time presented in its entirety, Dvořák's *American*. Here the quintet display their innate musicality even more thoroughly than in the Ewald in a winningly phrased performance. Sandwiched between the Ravel and Dvořák come Satie's *Gymnopédies*, but why do arrangers always seem to miss out the second? Nonetheless, the pair are beautifully played in Analekta's crystal-clear sound. Warmly recommended. **Guy Rickards**

Carnegie Hall, New York

Our monthly guide to North American venues

Year opened 1891

Architect William Burnet Tuthill

Capacity Isaac Stern Hall 2804 seats, Judy and Arthur Zankel Hall 599 seats, Joan and Sanford I Weill Recital Hall 268 seats

Carnegie Hall's story began during a honeymoon cruise, when the industrialist/philanthropist Andrew Carnegie and his new bride encountered the conductor Walter Damrosch. At that time New York City did not have a venue specifically built for orchestral and choral music. Damrosch expressed his desire for just that, and Carnegie agreed to foot the bill.

With architect William B Tuthill and the Chicago-based acoustic consultants Adler & Sullivan signed on, a cornerstone was cemented in 1890 on parcels of land that Carnegie had purchased between 56th and 57th Streets on 7th Avenue. It was one of the last New York buildings constructed entirely out of masonry, although future modifications brought steel into the mix. By April 1891 the Recital Hall (where Zankel Hall resides today) was ready for business. May 5 marked the main Music Hall's official opening with a five-day festival featuring Tchaikovsky conducting his own music. Carnegie Hall quickly established itself as the city's premier concert venue, where world-class music luminaries reigned, with the New York Philharmonic as de facto ensemble-in-residence.

During production of the 1946 feature film *Carnegie Hall*, the original canopy above the stage was broken in order to accommodate cameras and lights. Audiences couldn't see this big hole, yet it exposed a huge area above the stage that acted like a sound chamber. Some listeners claimed to hear sonic improvement, yet others experienced a bothersome echo in the first 15 rows.



By the late 1950s the Philharmonic's eminent move to the new Lincoln Center complex left Carnegie Hall without a steady and dependable source of income. When owner Robert Simon, Jr announced the hall's demolition, a committee founded by violinist Isaac Stern and philanthropist Jacob M Kaplan persuaded the city to save the hall by purchasing it. In turn, the city would lease the venue to the not-for-profit Carnegie Hall Corporation, which runs it to this day.

In late 1997 the former Carnegie Hall Cinema was reclaimed for its original concert-hall purpose. As a consequence, 6300 cubic yards of bedrock had to be excavated for the construction of the \$72m state-of-the-art Zankel Hall, which opened in September 2003 with a two-week festival curated by John Adams, the third composer to hold the Richard and Barbara Debs Composer's Chair created in 1995. The opening of the Judith and Burton Resnick Education Wing in 2014 expanded upon Isaac Stern's long-held mission to nurture young talent and expand audience outreach. With its 130th anniversary on the not-so-far horizon, Carnegie Hall can proudly take stock in its formidable artistic heritage while continuing to make history. **Jed Distler**

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A LETTER FROM *Kansas City*

Hilary Stroh reports from a city in the Midwest that straddles two states and boasts a fabulous new arts centre



With a metropolitan population of 2.1 million straddling two states, Kansas and Missouri, Kansas City's musical scene has gone from doughty persistence to thriving and ambitious in the course of several decades.

An eye-catching venue in a prominent position overlooking Kansas City, Missouri, the Kauffman Center opened to great fanfare in 2011. It has radically transformed the entire performing arts scene, making the city more attractive to performers and audiences alike, and allowing the Resident Arts Organizations, the Symphony, Lyric Opera and Ballet, to conceive of themselves on a far larger scale. It is a city in which a new cultural energy is palpable, an energy that the RAOs and other musical organisations and ensembles are determined to harness.

From the point of view of a performer who might make the city a career home, it is much more feasible now to have ambitions, to carve out a niche and to attain a good standard of living.

Celebration is the key driver of the Kansas City Symphony's programming this season. The celebration is threefold. A series of concerts honouring Beethoven's 250th birthday has been launched in the Kauffman Center's Helzberg Hall, the first featuring Pamela Frank, Emanuel Ax and Yo-Yo Ma. All told, the season will be a robust form of homage, not only featuring two piano concertos, five of the symphonies, the Mass in C and the Violin Concerto, but also contemporary works inspired by Beethoven, such as Mason Bates's *Ode* and Kevin Puts's *Inspiring Beethoven*.

Another layer of celebration intimately links the global and the local. This year marks the centenary of the birth of the violinist Isaac Stern; his son, Michael Stern, celebrates his own 15th anniversary as music director of the Symphony. Performers who were friends or protégés of his famed father will appear during the season, to join in celebrating an exceptional American musical dynasty.

The Lyric Opera, for its part, is energetically creating the future with its Explorations series, presenting new works in an intimate setting and pushing the boundaries of audience taste. In January, Laura Karpman and Kelley Rourke's song-cycle *When there are Nine* was premiered: a celebration of the 100th anniversary of female suffrage. Opera America's President and CEO Marc Scorca, whose organisation marks 50 years in existence, will come to speak about women composers. Scorca celebrates the fact that opera has gone from being an 'imported European' art form to a

'dynamic contemporary American cultural expression' and the Lyric Opera's programming certainly reflects that broader trend. On the main stage, we look ahead to a spring performance of *The Shining*, an opera based on Stephen King's horror story.


The Harriman-Jewell Series has been bringing the best outside talent into the city since the early 1960s. From soloists to orchestras, its hallmark lies in showcasing variety and quality. Since 2011, it has seen an increase in the number of orchestras who want to visit in order to experience the splendid acoustic of the Helzberg Hall. To reach new audiences and make musical life more accessible, the series regularly hosts free discovery concerts.

The Friends of Chamber Music has served for over 40 years as the hub of chamber and early music in the region; it also has a third series devoted to piano recitals. Intentional about

attracting younger audiences and conscious of its educational mission, all under 17 are admitted free of charge, and programmes feature extensive glossaries

demystifying the classical idiom for novice listeners. The series also fulfils a vital role in bringing the genres' most notable performers to the Midwest: this season, for example, The Tallis Scholars and the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin will perform.

At the grass-roots level, community music-making has always had a strong profile in church communities and universities. What would become UMKC's conservatory was the first in the country to be publically owned back in 1916, and continues to cultivate the city's youthful musical talent. Johnson County Community College has been running a performing arts series since 1990: this season's spotlight is on female artists. Last year, a string quartet named Opus 76 formed, running free concerts throughout the season as a 'service to the community of Kansas City'. This year, their success has meant expansion from the original six concerts to nine. They actively welcome families with young children, a rare find in the classical world, and surely an excellent way to introduce the city's next generation to great art.

This letter could not be complete without mentioning the unique Kansas tradition of Symphony in the Flint Hills, which takes place every June in the midst of the wide open spaces of the tallgrass prairie south-west of the city, attracting thousands: set in this distinctive ecosystem, it is a place where regional music-making truly comes home. 

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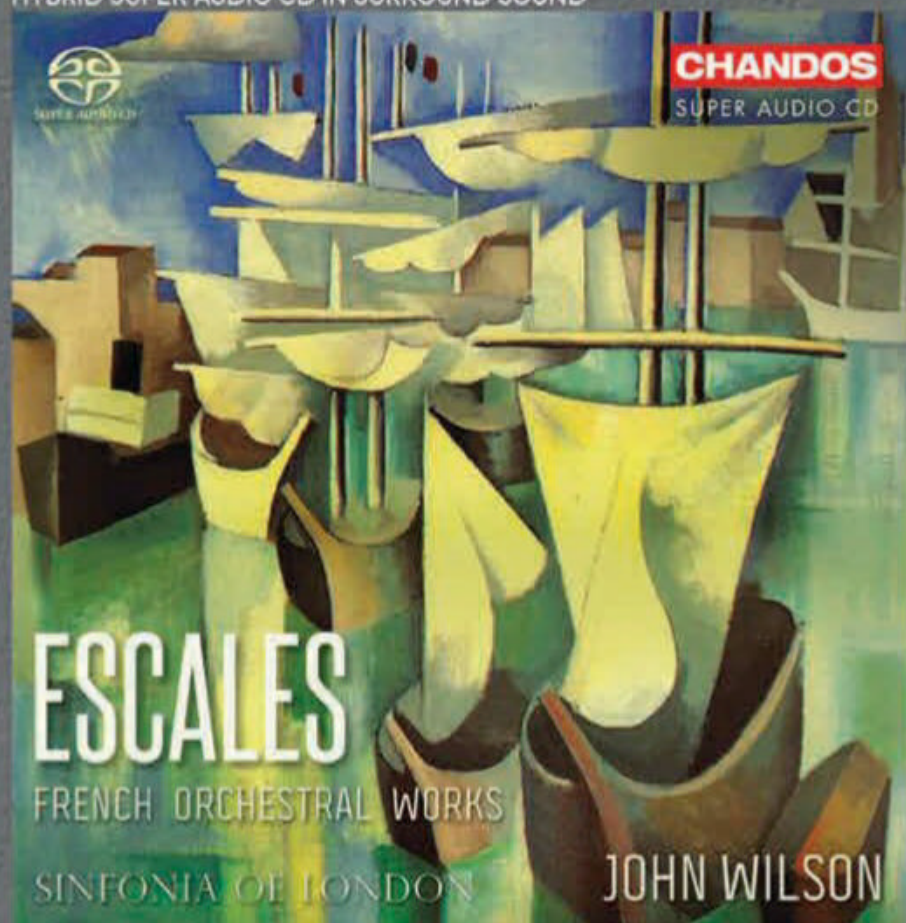
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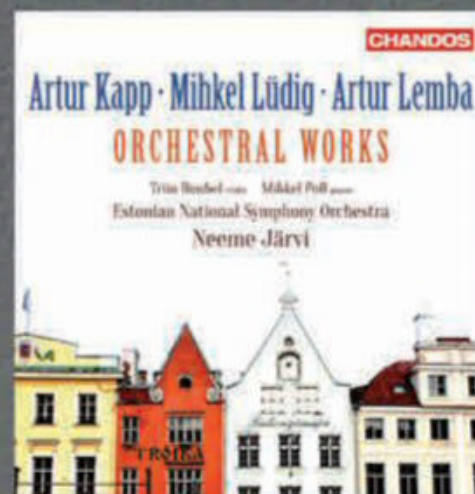
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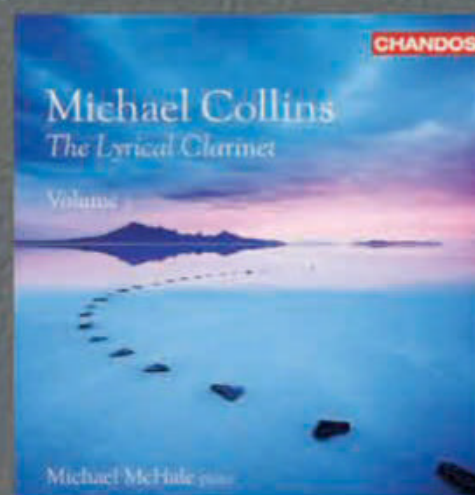


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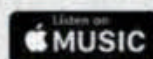
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The importance of open-minded artists

When writing about musicians, it's usual to see a familiar career path – the opportunities offered, the progressive filling of a familiar-looking CV. In the case of conductors, for example, it usually involves a journey through established orchestras or ensembles, each post gaining in responsibility and prestige; for pianists a competition win perhaps, followed by city-hopping recitals; for a singer, a progress through the route of roles that suit a certain voice type. And there's nothing wrong with that. But neither is it the only way – or, for some artists, the right one.

Take this month's cover artist, the conductor John Wilson, whose journey continues to defy predictability. I first encountered him in relation to his vibrant performances of MGM scores, followed by equally fine recordings of Elgar, Copland and others. Now come two discs of completely thrilling music-making from a hand-crafted ensemble under the newly revived Sinfonia of London name. Given the path of building his own orchestras, often for repertoire or recording-only projects, Wilson is very well known by specific audiences for specialist projects (not least to viewers of the BBC Proms), but maybe not fully appreciated for the full breadth of his work. He is an artist who knows his own mind – and it's a refreshingly open one, the only criteria for repertoire being its quality and his own tastes, demonstrated by the way references to Eric Coates, Paul McCartney and Schubert all sit naturally in the same points of discussion. Best of all, he's an artist who adores recording, the legacy of which is destined



to be a discography of the highest quality, comprising a refreshingly unorthodox mix of repertoire.

The mezzo-soprano Kate Lindsey could also be said to fit into an unorthodox career trajectory, one that might sit within the wonderfully odd-shaped box shared by the likes of Barbara Hannigan or, in another discipline, violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja. Lindsey's first Alpha recording turned out to be of Kurt Weill songs, which sits neither neatly nor obviously among her other albums of contemporary repertoire, Monteverdi, Scarlatti, Handel and Haydn. All credit to her, too, for following her own path.

Perhaps that's something that defines our age – not just culturally but in wider society too: a bold openness to thinking differently, to challenging comfortable consensus and the accepted ways of doing things, whether that be forging new paths, or sometimes reviving old ones. Add in the equally independent-minded pianist Benjamin Grosvenor, and the trio of musicians we focus on in this issue rather neatly captures the variety and diversity of the sort of intriguing artists most compellingly shaping music today. Throughout the year, we'll profile many more such thought-provoking figures. As we step into a new decade, perhaps the only thing that's certain is the uncertainty of what shape the years ahead will take. It's in this mould that the most fascinating artists of our age, or indeed any age, are formed – and like all great artists they will be both chronicler and catalysts of whatever that future might be. We promise to keep our ears and minds open to telling their stories.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



JAMES JOLLY
enjoyed meeting Kate Lindsey this month. 'Interviewing her in Vienna about Baroque cantatas

the morning after the premiere of Olga Neuwirth's *Orlando* vividly brought home to me her versatility and range, as well as her musical curiosity,' he recalls. 'She's clearly a mezzo to watch!'



'For my money, the conductor John Wilson is the Beecham and Barbirolli of the 21st century,

rolled into one', writes the author of this month's cover story, **RICHARD BRATBY**. 'He's a joy to talk to – candid, enthusiastic, and always ready to spring some delightful surprise.'



'It's always stimulating to talk with Benjamin Grosvenor,' writes **TIM PARRY**, who has followed his career closely

since his early teenage years. 'He can be reserved, but his good humour is soon apparent, as is his self-effacing modesty and his generosity towards his colleagues, something that is warmly reciprocated.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Michelle Assay
Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer)
Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows
David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood
Charlotte Gardner • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence
Andrew Mellor • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepilova • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol
Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards
Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Edward Seckerson • Mark Seow • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn
Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse
Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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EDITORIAL

Phone 020 7738 5454 **Fax** 020 7733 2325
email gramophone@markallengroup.com
EDITOR AND PUBLISHER Martin Cullingford
DEPUTY EDITOR Sarah Kirkup / 020 7501 6365
REVIEWS EDITOR Tim Parry / 020 7501 6367
ONLINE CONTENT EDITOR James McCarthy
SUB-EDITOR David Threasher / 020 7501 6370
SUB-EDITOR Marija Đurić Speare
ART DIRECTOR Dinah Lone / 020 7501 6689
PICTURE EDITOR Sunita Sharma-Gibson
AUDIO EDITOR Andrew Everard
EDITORIAL ADMINISTRATOR Libby McPhee
THANKS TO Hannah Nepilova and Charlotte Gardner
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF James Jolly

ADVERTISING

Phone 020 7738 5454 **Fax** 020 7733 2325
email gramophoneads@markallengroup.com
COMMERCIAL MANAGER
Esther Zuke / 020 7501 6368
SALES EXECUTIVE
Samuel Desborough / 020 7501 6373

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BACK ISSUES

0800 137201 **(UK)** +44 (0)1722 716997 **(overseas)**
subscriptions@markallengroup.com

PUBLISHING

Phone 020 7738 5454
HEAD OF MARKETING AND DIGITAL STRATEGY Luca Da Rè / 020 7501 6362
MARKETING MANAGER
John Barnett / 020 7501 6233
MARKETING EXECUTIVE
Hayley Sigrist / 020 7738 6459
GROUP INSTITUTIONAL SALES MANAGER Jas Atwal
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR
Richard Hamshire / 01722 716997
PRODUCTION MANAGER Kyri Apostolou
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
Sally Boettcher / 01722 716997
SUBSCRIPTIONS MANAGER
Bethany Foy / 01722 716997
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Martin Cullingford
MANAGING DIRECTOR Paul Geoghegan
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Ben Allen
CHAIRMAN Mark Allen



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John Gilhooly on Beethoven's powerful message

KRISTIAN BEZUIDENHOUT
PABLO HERAS-CASADO

Beethoven

Piano Concertos
nos. 2 & 5 'Emperor'

FREIBURGER BAROCKORCHESTER

Beethoven's five piano concertos relate, in a sense, part of the composer's life: some twenty years during which a young musician from Bonn made several revised versions of the first concerto he wrote (a springboard to Viennese success that ended up being called no.2), before becoming the familiar 'Emperor' of music embodied by the brilliant inspiration of no.5. Two hundred and fifty years after his birth, it is with these two extremes that Kristian Bezuidenhout, Pablo Heras-Casado and the Freiburger Barockorchester have chosen to start an exciting period-instrument trilogy of the concertos that bids fair to be a landmark!



Photo: © Igor Studio

HMM 902411

Reine de cœur

German and French Songs on Love and Loss

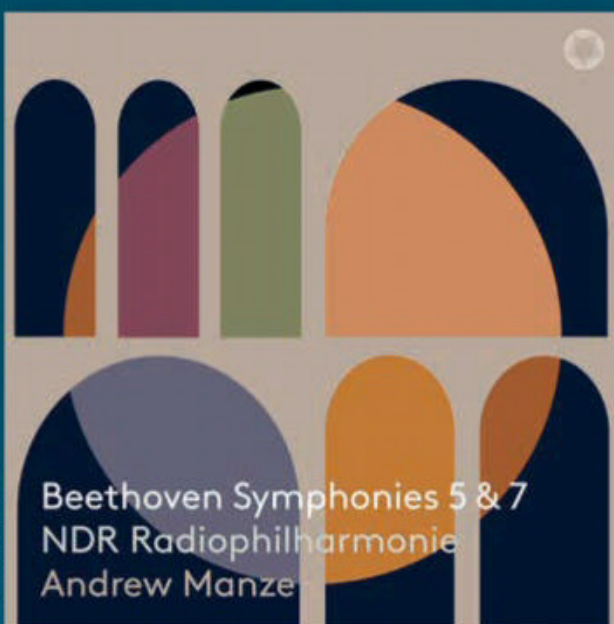
Star soprano **Hanna-Elisabeth Müller** brings the German and French art song traditions together, focusing on song cycles by Robert Schumann, Alexander von Zemlinsky and Francis Poulenc, accompanied by pianist **Juliane Ruf**. The album presents a highly personal anthology of songs that address love and loss, and the heights and depths of the human soul.

NEW
ALBUMS!

PTC 5186 810

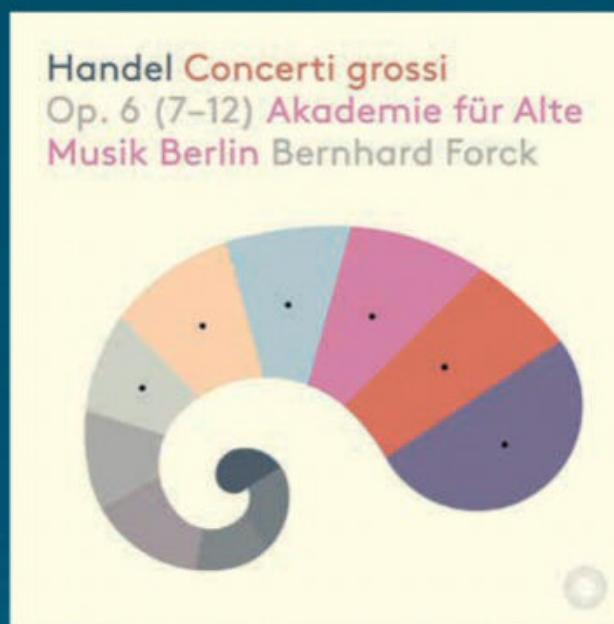


PTC 5186 814



Beethoven Symphonies 5 & 7
NDR Radiophilharmonie
Andrew Manze

PTC 5186 738



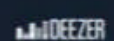
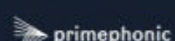
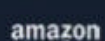
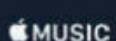
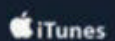
Handel Concerti Grossi Op.6 (7-12)
Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin
Bernhard Forck

PTC 5186 823



Haydn & Stamitz
Ana de la Vega
Ramón Ortega Quero
Trondheim Soloists

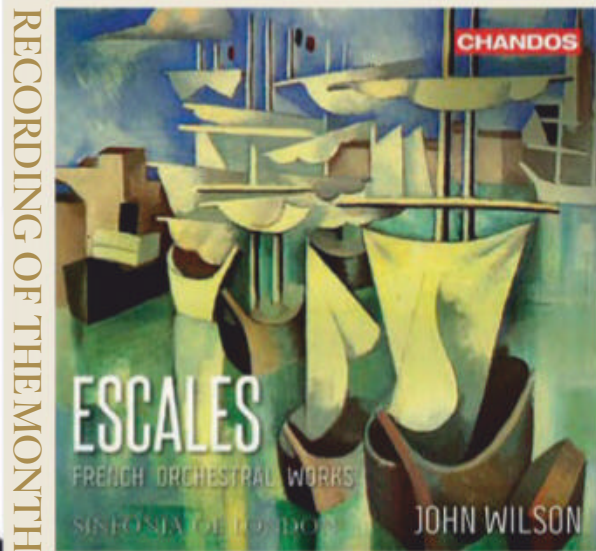
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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



'ESCALES - FRENCH ORCHESTRAL WORKS'
Sinfonia of London
Chandos
► **TIM ASHLEY'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 30**

Album after album, our cover artist John Wilson proves his remarkable ability to inspire riveting performances from remarkable players; this album of French music is a stunning delight.



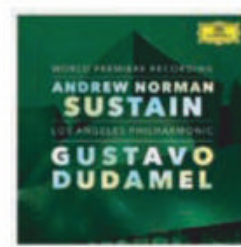
BARBER. TCHAIKOVSKY
Violin Concertos
Johan Dalene *vn*
Norrköping SO / Daniel Belindulf

BIS
Johan Dalene, winner of 2019's Carl Nielsen competition and a recent 'One to Watch', with a superb concerto coupling.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 32**



BRAHMS Double Concerto
SCHUMANN Violin Concerto
Antje Weithaas *vn*
Maximilian Hornung *vc*
NDR Radiophilharmonie

/ Andrew Manze CPO
Performances of two works which our critic now names his top recommendations.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 36**



A NORMAN Sustain
Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra / Gustavo Dudamel
DG
Andrew Norman

marks the LA Philharmonic's centenary by thinking ahead to its 200th, and the questions that raises about our stewardship of our planet.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 41**



'THE LYRICAL CLARINET, VOL 2'
Michael Collins *cl*
Michael McHale *pf*
Chandos

You know a new album by the clarinet virtuoso Michael Collins is going to impress and charm; his programme here allows his beautiful fluid tone full rein to delve and delight.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 55**



PROKOFIEV
Piano Sonatas Nos 6-8
Steven Osborne *pf*
Hyperion

Steven Osborne, a pianist whose playing speaks always of reflective thought, musical instinct and compelling technique, adds these three Prokofiev sonatas to his already extraordinary discography.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 63**



TCHAIKOVSKY
Piano Works
Peter Donohoe *pf*
Signum

Peter Donohoe draws on his affinity with Russian culture to offer 'perhaps the most consistently enjoyable ... recording of Tchaikovsky's piano solos of recent years', as our critic Jeremy Nicholas puts it.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 65**



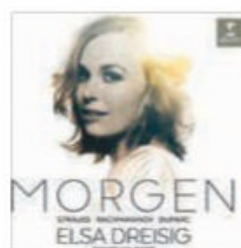
'VERSAILLES'
Alexandre Tharaud *pf*
Erato

Alexandre Tharaud is an artist able to make the rhythmic essence and inward intensity of the Baroque feel vibrantly alive on a modern piano, and this wonderful programme is another impressive achievement.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**



LISZT 'The Complete Songs, Vol 6'
Julia Kleiter *sop*
Julius Drake *pf*
Hyperion

An excellent series continues with a very beautiful recital, this time with Julia Kleiter joining pianist Julius Drake for a section of songs which feel perfectly suited to her characterful voice.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 75**



'MORGEN'
Elsa Dreisig *sop*
Jonathan Ware *pf*
Erato

A truly captivating album from a young soprano fast emerging as one of her generation's most eloquent and engaging singers, all woven around Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs*.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 81**



DVD/BLU-RAY
MOZART Die Entführung aus dem Serail
Soloists; La Scala, Milan / Zubin Mehta
C Major Entertainment
A modern re-creation of a famous production of half a century earlier: 'a delight' writes our reviewer Richard Lawrence of this DVD release.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 89**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
'KATHLEEN FERRIER IN NEW YORK'
Kathleen Ferrier *contr* New York Philharmonic Orchestra / Bruno Walter
Somm
Kathleen Ferrier and Bruno Walter's Vienna *Das Lied von der Erde* has iconic status, but this performance from four years earlier comes highly recommended too.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 77**

FOR THE RECORD

Farewell to Peter Schreier

German lyric tenor Peter Schreier has died aged 84. During a long career, he graduated from singing treble in the Dresdner Kreuzchor to becoming one of the world's leading tenors, embracing song, oratorio and opera and performing alongside some of the greatest artists of the day.

Raised by a musical family in Meissen, Saxony, Schreier was spotted by Rudolf Mauersberger, the Dresdner Kreuzchor's conductor; when Schreier's voice broke, he joined the city's Musikhochschule.

He made his debut in 1957 as the First Prisoner in Beethoven's *Fidelio*. In 1962 he took on larger roles such as Belmonte (*Die Entführung aus dem Serail*) and Tamino (*Die Zauberflöte*). He joined the Berlin State Opera and also sang with the Vienna State Opera. In 1966 he made his debut at Bayreuth, singing the young seaman in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in the now legendary Wieland Wagner production conducted by Karl Böhm (with Wolfgang Windgassen and Birgit Nilsson in the title-roles, subsequently released by DG). Soon afterwards, he made his debuts at Salzburg and in New York, and a major career took flight encompassing more than 60 roles (many of them recorded with conductors such as Böhm, Karajan, Carlos Kleiber and Sir Colin Davis). Besides Mozart, his repertoire included Almaviva and Fenton (Verdi and Nicolai), Des Grieux, the Simpleton in *Boris Godunov*, Leukippos in *Daphne*, the Dancing Master

in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Flamand in *Capriccio*, David (*Die Meistersinger*), Mime (*Ring*), Palestrina (in Pfitzner's opera) and Lensky (*Eugene Onegin*).

Schreier sang oratorio and choral works throughout his career (it was the role of the Evangelist in Bach's Passions that prompted his desire to sing professionally). Again, he recorded extensively – with Erhard Mauersberger, Karl Richter, Claudio Abbado, Kurt Masur and Helmut Rilling, plus Karajan and Böhm.

Schreier was a magnificent Lieder singer; he contributed to Graham Johnson's Schubert Lieder Edition for Hyperion and, in partnership with pianists such as Sviatoslav Richter and András Schiff, made a series of universally acclaimed recordings. His *Winterreise* with Richter (Philips) won *Gramophone's* Solo Vocal Award in 1986, his *Schwanengesang* with Schiff won in the same category in 1990 and the following year he again took the Solo Vocal Award with Schiff for *Die schöne Müllerin* (Decca).

Praising Schreier in *Gramophone's* 'Reputations' (9/03), Alan Blyth wrote: 'Schreier's timbre has never been to everyone's taste, some finding in his tone what the Germans term "grell": perhaps the closest translation is "glaring". To my ears that quality is one that adds to the individuality of Schreier's vocal makeup. In any case, while it may be there in



Schreier and Schiff: together they won two Gramophone Awards

his *forte* singing, it is singularly absent from his beautiful *mezza voce*, which he controls literally from the head as well as from the heart.'

In 1970 Schreier took up conducting and appeared with orchestras such as the Vienna and New York Philharmonics and the Staatskapelle Dresden; with the latter, he recorded a fine account of Mozart's Requiem which received *Gramophone's* Choral Award in 1984.

Peter Schreier: born July 29, 1935; died December 25, 2019

Remastered Miserere marks Gimell's 40th anniversary

When The Tallis Scholars recorded Allegri's *Miserere* at Merton College Chapel, Oxford, in March 1980, the reputation of this British early music mixed-voice ensemble sky-rocketed and, together with its director Peter Phillips, the choir became a household name. The 'marvellous acoustics', wrote reviewer Richard Fairman in these pages, 'make the *Miserere* as emotional as one could wish'.

That recording was also the first to be made by Gimell, the record label founded



by Phillips and Steve Smith solely to make and release recordings by the group (pictured above in the same year as that memorable recording, inside Merton College Chapel). The label has gone on to make nearly 60 recordings, with many more still in the pipeline.

by Phillips and Steve Smith solely to make and release recordings by the group (pictured above in the same year as that memorable recording, inside Merton College Chapel). The label has gone on to make nearly 60 recordings, with many more still in the pipeline.

To celebrate its 40th anniversary, Gimell is revisiting the original master-tape of that 1980 recording to create a new high-resolution master of the full album – featuring not just the *Miserere* but also Mundy's *Vox Patris caelestis* and Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli*. This will be available to download or stream from March 20 – almost exactly 40 years after those first sessions. Gimell is offering 10 *Gramophone* readers a free high-res download via Hyperion Records' website; see gramophone.co.uk for details.

Queen honours classical musicians

The New Years Honours list for 2020 saw the young cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason and the composer Helen Grime receive MBEs, while OBEs were awarded to the composer and mezzo-soprano Judith Bingham (pictured)



and Timothy Walker, Chief Executive and Artist Director of the London Philharmonic. The renowned broadcaster Humphrey Burton, CBE, was made Knight Bachelor for his outstanding services to classical music.

BBC unleashes more Beethoven

The BBC has announced further plans as part of its year-long, cross-platform 'Beethoven Unleashed' 250th anniversary celebrations. Top of the list are a three-part series which tells the composer's life story in the present tense and a broadcast of the Royal Opera's forthcoming *Fidelio* – both for BBC Four.

Other highlights include a marathon Composer of the Week from Donald Macleod, an exploration of Beethoven's female contemporaries and a forensic investigation of the man himself based on his autopsy results – all on BBC Radio 3.

There will also be numerous live concerts given by various BBC ensembles across the UK, including a re-creation of Beethoven's historic four-hour 1808 concert and a performance of David Lang's new, *Fidelio*-inspired opera, *Prisoner of the State*. 'This unique celebration will offer audiences an opportunity to explore Beethoven afresh and understand his continued relevance today,' said Radio 3 Controller Alan Davey. 'From the latest research into his life to concerts of excellence, there's something for everyone.'

ONE TO WATCH

Tom Borrow piano

Being *Gramophone*, it's when an exciting young artist is about to appear on a recording that we really start spreading the news. One such is Tom Borrow, a 19-year-old pianist who has just been signed to Hänssler and is soon to make his first recording for the label.

Born in 2000 in Tel Aviv (where he now studies), Borrow has for the past four years been regularly mentored by Murray Perahia. Like many virtuosos, his career path has been a series of planned steps and random opportunities. The latter includes being called on to replace Khatia Buniatishvili with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in January last year, performing Ravel's Piano Concerto in G at 36 hours' notice. Other appearances already confirmed in coming seasons include concerts with the London Philharmonic and Royal Philharmonic orchestras, the Sao Paulo Symphony Orchestra (under Thierry Fischer) and the New Jersey Symphony (under Xian Zhang).

But it's his forthcoming Hänssler recording that will likely introduce most *Gramophone* readers to his playing. The album's title is 'Romantica', Hebrew for the word 'romantic',



both reflecting Borrow's Israeli roots and also the emphasis of the album's repertoire: Franck's Prelude, Chorale and Fugue (there's a YouTube video of him playing this with individuality and elegance, worth checking out), Scriabin's Sonata No 5, Rachmaninov's *Corelli* Variations, the Liszt *Mephisto* Waltz No 1 and Chopin's Polonaise-Fantasia. It will be recorded in the renowned acoustic of London's Henry Wood Hall in April under the masterful eyes and ears of producer Andrew Keener, and is due for release in September. 'Tom is a truly special young pianist,' says label head Günter Hänssler. 'Technically brilliant and with the soul of a poet.'

GRAMOPHONE Online

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Podcasts

The *Gramophone* podcast series continues with revealing interviews with soprano Louise Alder and pianist Stephen Hough. Alder (pictured) has released her first recording for Chandos, 'Lines Written During a Sleepless Night: The Russian Connection', which sees her joined by pianist Joseph Middleton for a fascinating, personal choice of songs by Tchaikovsky, Sibelius and Rachmaninov.



Alder explains her Russian connections to James Jolly

Hough, meanwhile, has been enjoying enormous success with his new solo Brahms album for Hyperion, not least in these pages where it was named January's Recording of the Month. All podcasts are free and available on most podcasting platforms.

Blogs

Beethoven's legendary Academy events presented new music for an audience hungry for novelty. In an engrossing blog, conductor François-Xavier Roth explains how the spirit of these concerts has inspired his concert at London's Southbank Centre on February 21 with pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard and the Gürzenich-Orchester Köln.

NEW RELEASES ON WARNER CLASSICS AND ERATO



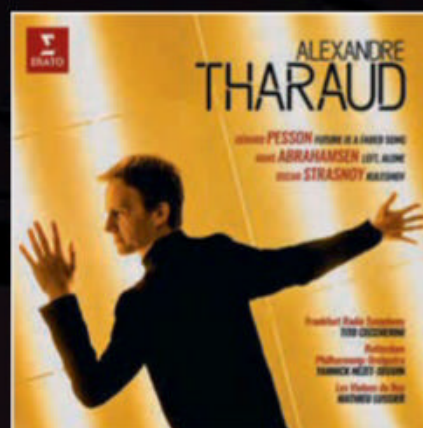
ELSA DREISIG

Soprano **Elsa Dreisig** follows her debut album *Miroir(s)* with a recital of songs in collaboration with pianist Jonathan Ware. Taking its title, *Morgen*, from one of Richard Strauss's best-loved lieder, it interweaves his music (notably the Four Last Songs) with thematically linked works by Sergey Rachmaninov and Henri Duparc.



FAZIL SAY

Marking Beethoven's 250th birthday in a suitably heroic fashion, **Fazil Say** has recorded all 32 of the composer's piano sonatas. He sees the sonatas as "a sacred text for musicians", adding that "when we interpret a composer's work, we need to remain faithful to it. Compositions should be interpreted with the same freshness as a completely new piece of music"



ALEXANDRE THARAUD

World premiere recordings of three aesthetically diverse piano concertos that were written for Alexandre Tharaud. They are *Left, alone* by the Dane Hans Abrahamsen (b. 1952), *Future is a faded song* by the Frenchman Gérard Pesson (b. 1958) and *Kuleshov* by the Argentinian-born Frenchman Oscar Strasnoy (b. 1970).



JOYCE DiDONATO

Joyce DiDonato has staked a powerful claim on the multi-faceted title role of Handel's opera *Agrippina*. Joining them on this recording is a cast of established and rising stars that includes Marie-Nicole Lemieux, Franco Fagioli, Luca Pisaroni, Elsa Benoit and Jakub Józef Orliński.



DIANA DAMRAU

The centrepiece of this album of Strauss songs is the sublime *Vier letzte Lieder*, in which Damrau – born and trained in Bavaria – joins forces with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and its long-standing Chief Conductor Mariss Jansons, in what was to become his final recording. Her partner in a tempting and diverse selection of songs with piano is Helmut Deutsch.



ERIC LU

The 22 year-old winner and Dame Fanny Waterman Gold Medallist at the prestigious Leeds International Piano Competition 2018 begins his Warner Classics exclusive contract with an exquisite new recital featuring Chopin's 24 *Préludes*, Schumann's *Ghost Variations*, and Brahms' *Intermezzo* No. 1, Op. 117.



YUNDI

Yundi returns with an album of Chopin's Piano Concertos Nos 1 and 2, on which he directs the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra from the keyboard – his first recording as pianist-conductor and his first recording of the Piano Concerto No 2.



PHILHARMONIA AT 75

A prestigious name since it came into being in 1945, the Philharmonia was established by legendary producer Walter Legge as a high-calibre house orchestra for EMI. The performances in this 24 CD box set here cover the period between 1946 and 1964, conducted by Karajan, Furtwängler, Toscanini, Klemperer, Giulini and Cantelli.



GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ... *Nocturne*

Richard Bratby traces the evolution of this musical evocation of the night-time

‘On a poet’s lips I slept / Dreaming of a love-adept.’ No composer chose poetry more carefully than did Britten, and the lines by Percy Bysshe Shelley that open his Op 60 Nocturne (1958) could sum up the whole genre of the ‘night piece’: a mood of stillness, moonlight, dreams and – of course – love. At least, that’s been the case since the Irish pianist John Field composed his 16 nocturnes for piano, between 1812 and his death in January 1837, and since Chopin elevated the form to canonic status with 21 more composed in the 1830s and ’40s.

Liszt summed up Field’s creation, describing the nocturnes as ‘these vague Aeolian harmonies, these half-formed sighs floating through the air, softly lamenting and dissolved in delicious melancholy’. And yet, the 18th-century Notturmo was simply a serenade: intended for outdoor amusement at the tail end of an evening’s celebration. Mozart’s Notturmo in D, K286 (1777), written for four antiphonal orchestras, is an exuberant *jeu d’esprit* designed to keep the party going. Field and Chopin kept the basic idea of a serenade (a lover’s song), and their nocturnes all feature a long singing melody (Italian *bel canto* had worked its magic) over a gentle accompaniment.

The same applies – even in transfigured or idealised form – to the works of composer-pianists who followed them, whether Alkan, Scriabin or Fauré. The Notturmo of Borodin’s String Quartet No 2 (1881) emulates the shifting textures of a keyboard accompaniment – and gradually, nocturnes drifted free of the



Following in Field’s footsteps, Chopin elevated the Nocturne to canonic status

keyboard. The enchantment of the Nocturne from Mendelssohn’s incidental music for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1842) lies in the tenderness of its melody and the glowing softness of its instrumental colours. And after James McNeill Whistler started using the term in 1871 to describe near-abstract paintings (Chopin was the

inspiration), colour and atmosphere proved more than enough to evoke a mood. Debussy’s orchestral Nocturnes (1899) took their cue from Whistler, as did the Nocturne scherzo of Vaughan Williams’s *A London Symphony* (1913) – a swift, fantastic evocation of urban nightlife heard from afar.

So we’re back at the party again, but 20th-century composers have also used the term nocturne to connote solitary dread (Shostakovich’s Violin Concerto No 1, 1948), and a very particular kind of sensuality – as in Britten’s Nocturne, simultaneously richly coloured mood-piece and song. Living composers of nocturnes, like Robin Holloway, Kaija Saariaho and Salvatore Sciarrino, have a deep tradition to draw upon; and it seems that there’ll always be something irresistible about music that sings in the night. **G**

IN THE STUDIO

● In mid-December, the *Gramophone* Award-winning **Sean Shibe** was in Crichton, Scotland, to conclude his recording of the Bach Solo Lute Suites on guitar. The recording, for Delphian, is due out in May.

● **Steven Osborne** and **Paul Lewis** are recording a sumptuous programme of French duets for Hyperion. The two pianists will be at St Silas the Martyr, Kentish Town, in March to set down works by Fauré, Poulenc, Debussy, Stravinsky and Ravel, including Poulenc’s Sonata for Piano Four Hands and Debussy’s *Six épigraphes antiques*. The recording is due for issue in April 2021.

● Again for Hyperion, the **London Haydn Quartet** is at Potton Hall, Suffolk, from February 27 to March 2 to record Haydn’s String Quartets Nos 1-6. The release is expected in March next year.

● **Amandine Beyer** and her ensemble Gli Incogniti were at the Arras Theatre, France, in November to record the symphonies of CPE Bach. The results will be issued by Harmonia Mundi this September.

● **Tabea Zimmermann** and **Javier Perianes** were at Teldex Studio, Berlin, last month to record ‘Cantilena’ – a selection of Spanish and

Latin music for viola and piano. With composers such as Falla, Albéniz and Granados being represented, the album will be released in May this year – once again by Harmonia Mundi.

● Somm has recorded the world premiere of Ian Venables’s Requiem. In November, the **Gloucester Cathedral Choir** and conductor **Adrian Partington** were at Gloucester Cathedral, in the presence of the composer, to set down the work. It is due for release in June this year.

● **Quartetto di Cremona** is marking its 20th anniversary this year with an Italian-themed recording partly funded by the Franco Buitoni Award it received last March. The recording took place at the Fondazione Banna Spinola near Turin in December and is due for release in the latter half of 2020; the label is not yet confirmed. Repertoire includes Wolf’s *Italienische Serenade*, Mozart’s String Quartet in G, K80, and a new quartet commissioned from Nimrod Borenstein.

● **Ensemble Diderot** was at the Grand Hotel Toblach, one of Mahler’s favourite haunts, in December to record ‘The Berlin Album’. With a focus on composers who worked at Frederick the Great’s court in the 18th century, the album will be released by Audax in October.

ORCHESTRA *Insight ...*

The Philadelphia Orchestra

Our monthly series telling the story behind an orchestra

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Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin

If ever there was an orchestra defined by its string sound, it was the Philadelphia Orchestra. Can that level of definition remain, in an age of orchestras as chameleons? To understand this ensemble's sonic DNA you have to go back to 1912, when Leopold Stokowski took over as Music Director and started to engender a forthright mode of string playing that would be more easily picked up by the primitive recording equipment that so fascinated him.

No orchestra can boast a recording career like the one that followed. Under Stokowski it became the first to make electrical recordings, and under his successor Eugene Ormandy it was the first to perform on television. More recently, it became the first American orchestra to broadcast on the internet (1997) and the first to offer direct downloads (2006).

The full catalogue of recordings is mind-boggling. The lion's share was made under Ormandy, Music Director for a colossal 42 years. And if Stokowski was the eccentric pioneer among recording conductors, Ormandy perfected the art. Stokowski had achieved a seamless, vibrating resonance in the strings through his advocacy of 'free bowing' whereby individual strings bowed as they desired through sustained notes or lyrical passages. Former concertmaster Ormandy then came along and tamed the beast, cultivating that heavy sound into something more velvety.

Today, the 'Philadelphia sound' is defined as much by controlled, European-style brass and limpid woodwind as by



confident strings. It is, says Yannick Nézet-Séguin (Music Director since 2012), a 'generous sound' rooted in the principle of sustaining the line and (in the spirit of free bowing if not in the practice) dissolving the receding hierarchy of the string sections by having every player lead from his or her own chair.

But it depends, naturally, on repertoire. Nézet-Séguin has brought more contemporary, operatic and high-Classical repertoire to the ensemble's once staunchly Romantic and 20th-century diet, addressing the old argument that this was never an orchestra you'd want to hear in Haydn. Of the old sound? 'It is my job to nurture but also reinvent it,' says the conductor. Perhaps we best hear the 'traditional' Philadelphia sound these days in the repertoire that shaped it – not least Rachmaninov, with which Nézet-Séguin has recently returned the orchestra to the catalogue. It's a journey that's come full circle, as there's no composer closer to this orchestra: under Stokowski it gave the premiere of the *Paganini* Rhapsody with the composer at the piano, and under Ormandy the premiere of the *Symphonic Dances*. **Andrew Mellor**

ARTISTS *& their* INSTRUMENTS

David Childs on his euphonium

“The euphonium is a tenor-voiced instrument in B flat with the same range and pitch as its more familiar cousin, the trombone. Although both are made using the same length of tubing (approximately nine feet), the trombone plays chromatically using a slide, whereas the euphonium has piston valves like a trumpet. While the trombone has been around for over 600 years, the euphonium is relatively young, dating back to the early 19th century. At this time a business was founded in Paris, and subsequently established in London, which was destined to become renowned throughout the world for the excellence of its brass instruments. This famous name is Besson – the manufacturer of the euphonium I've played throughout my career.

The instrument I play is a 2019 Besson Prestige, generally recognised as the best euphonium available. Featuring four valves and a main-tuning-slide trigger to subtly manipulate pitch, it has not been customised in any way – it is the same model that the majority of my euphonium-playing colleagues choose to play.

My late grandfather played a Besson euphonium; so too did my father and uncle, and it was listening to their performances that drew



me to the instrument at a young age. Often referred to as 'the cello of the brass family', the euphonium derives its name from the Ancient Greek word 'euphōnos', meaning 'well-sounding' or 'sweet-voiced'. It is certainly capable of unique sonority which is largely down to the instrument's conical nature.


The trumpet and trombone are cylindrical instruments; their bore sizes remain consistent from the mouthpiece through to the bell. Conversely, the bore size of the conical euphonium increases

gradually, contributing to its less direct, mellifluous capabilities. However, with an increasing and varied repertoire, it is never a case of one sound or style suiting all, so for the modern-day euphonium soloist the instrument's versatility becomes key, making this my euphonium of choice.”

David Childs's Chandos recording, 'The Symphonic Euphonium, Vol 2', is reviewed on page 47

FROM WHERE I SIT

Edward Seckerson on the power
of an outstanding live performance



After so many years of concert-going – including a time when writing for *The Guardian* and *The Independent* newspapers that I was averaging three concerts a week minimum – it's good to be reminded that I can still be stunned, that a performance can still reveal things about a piece that I hadn't fully considered before. It happened again a couple of months back when Vladimir Jurowski seemingly excavated and re-evaluated Mahler's Fifth Symphony with the London Philharmonic. I shouldn't have been surprised – his reading of the Second Symphony (recorded live and reviewed by myself in these pages) threw up similar answers to often-asked questions – but what truly struck home this time was the revelation of how hard it must be to find your own way to a piece as frequently performed (and at such a consistently high level) as the Fifth.

Like all the best and most intellectually savvy conductors, Jurowski has that special ability to digest and then disregard other recordings, other views, of a piece and return once more to source, to the composer's score. So he may be influenced by, say, Leonard Bernstein but the only instincts he'll ultimately trust will be his own.

Mahler always said of the Fifth that the gigantic central *Scherzo* was its fulcrum and that conductors would invariably take it too fast. He was right. But how that movement sits in context, how it relates to the rest of the symphony, is undoubtedly the key to making it work. Jurowski was expansive throughout – not Barbirolli expansive (which one might reasonably characterise as just slow) – but expansive in the sense that the weighing and testing of every bar had consequences in relation to the whole. There was an imperative to it all. The tormented outburst at the heart of the first movement's funeral march for once felt mirrored in the turbulent second half of part one. Through a glass darkly. And that *Scherzo* (Part 2) was then a transition into the light – an open and infinitely airy tableau where horns echoed across great spaces, Jurowski quite literally separating his first horn from the rest of the section to accentuate distance and conjure a touch of visual theatre.

I am assuming it was recorded (let's hope so – there were microphones present) but then again can that recording, that 'snapshot' of a great performance (the best I've heard since Bernstein's Vienna account), ever quite recapture the edge-of-seat excitement, the constant sense of surprise, that the live event visited upon us? It is quite something when a piece you know so well is rendered new and unexpected by virtue of such fundamentals as tempo, phrasing and articulation.

Don't get me wrong: I want others to hear and experience Jurowski's performance as I did, and a recording can enable those who couldn't be there to share the experience. But I guess it's like taking a photograph of something visually momentous in the moment of seeing it. Yes, it's great that you can relive that moment again and again, maybe even recapture something of the frisson you felt at the time. But we were only present at this particular performance of Mahler Fifth under this conductor and in this hall once – and that experience was for one night only. **G**



MUSIC *man*

With two orchestras to his name and an ongoing relationship with Chandos, conductor John Wilson approaches all music – from Coates and Bennett to Duruflé and Korngold – with camaraderie and a strong dose of dynamism, finds **Richard Bratby**

Eric Coates knew how to get things done. ‘A flat on a top floor in the heart of London with a writing-room looking across the city far away to the Surrey hills and the sounds of traffic coming up to me from way down below ... this was my recipe for composing,’ he writes in his memoir *Suite in Four Movements* (1953). ‘I have tried both ways of living and, even to-day, I feel that the country is for dreaming and the town for work.’ I don’t know if John Wilson has any hankering for the country – and his high-rise apartment near Bankside is a good tube ride away from Coates’s flat above Baker Street Station. But the view is every bit as lively, and it’s easy to believe that Wilson is able to draw on that energy.

He’s certainly been hard at work. No one in British music can be unaware of the John Wilson Orchestra – the ensemble that Wilson started in 1994 with a handful of like-minded friends at college and which has since grown into a phenomenon: an all-swinging 70-piece reincarnation of one of those great Hollywood studio orchestras of the 1940s or ’50s. Lesser maestros would consider that enough of a job. But last year he launched a second orchestra, the Sinfonia of London, with an all-Korngold disc for Chandos. We’ve come to expect sonic miracles when Wilson picks up the baton, but the underlying achievement – of one man conceiving, conducting and managing the two most exciting orchestras in the UK today – is too rarely remarked upon.

‘I read a critic the other day who said that “John Wilson is moving into classical repertoire”,’ laughs Wilson, more in amusement than irritation. And indeed, it’s a funny sort of critic who, over the last two decades, could have failed to notice Wilson’s remarkable performances of Vaughan Williams, Bax, Debussy and Ravel; and his Copland series with the BBC Philharmonic or his *Madama Butterfly* and *Cendrillon* for Glyndebourne. If the idea persists in some quarters that ‘light’ and ‘serious’ music are separate worlds, the division never meant anything to Wilson. ‘Brahms’s Second Symphony might be my favourite thing to conduct in the whole world,’ he says. ‘I find it puzzling why people would want to pigeonhole you as one or the other. The best light music is a very serious business. Didn’t Karajan say, “Light music is my medicine?”’

At the moment, though, all talk is about his new project, which has seen Wilson assemble a world-class recording

orchestra for Chandos with something like the flair which saw Walter Legge create the Philharmonia Orchestra for EMI.

He makes it sound like the easiest thing in the world: ‘I’m in an exclusive contract with Chandos, because Ralph Couzens, the managing director, is the most marvellous person to work for. We tentatively started off with Copland with the BBC Philharmonic, and it was a real success – it sold better than we all expected, and it got great notices. From that we moved on to Richard Rodney Bennett with the BBC Scottish, which we’re still doing. And now we’ve started a series of Eric Coates. But amid

those strands of composer-led records, Ralph suddenly found himself with a week clear in the diary and we decided to use that week. I said to Ralph, “If there’s one thing I really, really want to do, it’s the

Korngold Symphony.” I’ve never felt so strongly about making a record. Ralph said, “Okay then, if you can find an orchestra, we’ll do it in January 2019.” He said this in late 2018. Every orchestra was already booked. So I put one together myself.’

And so he did – drawing on an address book filled with top-notch freelancers. The Sinfonia of London takes its name from the fabled ‘supergroup’ of London-based players of the 1950s and ’60s which made celebrated recordings under Barbirolli and Colin Davis, as well as classic film scores ranging from Bernard Herrmann’s *Vertigo* to (in a later incarnation, established in the 1980s) *Batman*, *StarGate* and *The Snowman*.

‘I’ve always thought that the Sinfonia of London, the great recording orchestra of yesteryear, should be revived,’ says Wilson. ‘I got in touch with Howard Blake and Peter Willison, who owned the rights to the name, and they agreed that I would be a good person to take it over. It’s a useful name because it’s got heritage, but it’s not burdened by it. It’s got London in the title, and sinfonia can mean anything from 12 players to 120. The thing that was most pleasing for me was that the first record I ever bought was Barbirolli’s “English String Music”, when I was 11. So it came kind of full circle when I acquired the name of the orchestra.’

And so Wilson and the Sinfonia of London assembled at St Augustine’s Church, Kilburn, in January 2019, and the results ... well, if you’ve heard the Korngold disc you’ll have drawn your own conclusions. Wilson is one of those conductors who can transform the sound of an orchestra, and I remember a previous conversation in which we discussed the secret of the lustrous tone and thrilling rhythmic kick that hits you straight

‘Why all the pigeonholing? The best light music is a very serious business. Didn’t Karajan say, “Light music is my medicine?”’



in the chest every time the John Wilson Orchestra plays live. It's a quality that knocks you sideways from the very first notes of their 2016 'Gershwin in Hollywood' album: for my money, the single most electrifying release of the last decade by any orchestra or conductor.

'They say that a recording is a snapshot of how the performer feels about a piece at any given time, but it's a permanent snapshot,' says Wilson. 'So I think it's always best to record stuff that you've already had your hands on, and that's not always possible these days. Think about Barbirolli recording the Elgar symphonies: how many times had he conducted those pieces before he recorded them? A hundred? Now, that

Gershwin disc came at a time with the John Wilson Orchestra when we'd been playing together for enough years that we knew what we were doing; the personnel had settled, we'd developed a style, we'd taken it on tour. So we knew our way around the music – and also it was arguably the best music we'd ever played.'



Unmissable: John Wilson with his eponymous orchestra at last year's BBC Proms

Which is precisely what you hear on that disc: musicians who sound as if they've played together all their lives, performing music they love with every ounce of artistry that they possess. It's the cumulation of years of attention to the precise details of a musical idiom, and Wilson doesn't demur when I suggest that it's as much a triumph of historically informed performance as any period-instrument Monteverdi Vespers. That polish, that flair, that sense of absolute stylistic rightness is what you hear on the Sinfonia of London's discs too: whether the Korngold, or their newest release – a mouth-watering programme of French music that includes Duruflé's *Trois danses*, Ibert's *Éscales* and an old

Wilson favourite, Debussy's *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune*.

'There's some overlap in the strings with the John Wilson Orchestra, though we have different wind, brass and percussion principals,' Wilson explains. 'But these are players I know, and musical relationships that go back a very long way. Somebody



American mezzo Kate Lindsey (see our feature, page 26) appeared with the John Wilson Orchestra as part of the Warner Brothers Story BBC Prom in August 2019

said to me that it's a consolidation of 30 years' worth of playing together – which is exactly what it is. So when we started, when we did the first take of Korngold's *Straussiana*, it really felt like we'd been playing together for years. Andrew Haveron's one of my best mates – I was best man when he got married. He was leading. And everywhere I looked, I had players who knew exactly what it was that I wanted, and I knew exactly what their strengths were.

'These players are concertmasters and section principals from the orchestras I've worked with. As with the John Wilson Orchestra, we have some pretty straightforward rules. Play with the beat, don't be late, read the information that the composer shows you. But also – and this is a really important point – I speak a lot to the section principals, all of whom I really trust and respect. I ask them, "Who should we have in this section? Who would be the best person to make this kind of sound?" That's half the battle, getting the right people there.'

'Someone asked me what's the difference between the JWO and other orchestras. And it's that you see players looking up'

That's the players accounted for, then – but how does Wilson himself approach the repertoire he loves? Legge famously said that the Philharmonia Orchestra should have 'style', not 'a style' – and while Wilson's ability to phrase as if every note has something meaningful to say makes his performances instantly recognisable, I'm fascinated by the care he takes with regard to finding precisely the right sound world for a given score. André Previn's MGM studio orchestration of *My Fair Lady* shouldn't be played like a Robert Russell Bennett arrangement for a Broadway pit band, and nor is it when the John Wilson Orchestra performs this music at the BBC Proms. Wilson's Korngold disc, it strikes me, evokes a particular era of orchestral playing: the great American virtuoso orchestras of the post-war years. I mention Fritz Reiner's RCA recordings in Chicago, and Wilson smiles.

'I'll tell you who one of my idols is,' he says: 'George Szell, because of the excellence he drew from the Cleveland Orchestra. I think their Walton Symphony No 2, and the Partita, is the most dazzling record ever made. It's to do with the clarity. Szell famously said, "First we get the perfect ensemble, then we start rehearsals." I think it was Kurt Sanderling who said that ensemble isn't everything, but it's a very good place to start. And then everybody can just look up. Somebody asked me years ago, "What's the difference between the John Wilson Orchestra and other orchestras?" And it's the fact that you see players looking up. If you've got the ensemble perfect, then you build everything else on top of it.'

This, then, is how you build an orchestra. Wilson's method is so effective that the Sinfonia of London found itself with the Korngold in the can and several days to spare, and so went straight on to its next recording: that all-French programme. Discs of Respighi and Dutilleux are already hurtling down the production schedules. Wilson has a soft spot the size of the Massif Central for French repertoire, and if critics haven't previously associated him with the Gallic style, they might soon find themselves surprised. 'Once we had everybody in the room, we thought, "Why not make another record?" So I asked myself, "What will show off a great band like this?" And it was clearly French music.' The Duruflé, in particular, is a revelation. 'Oh, it's marvellous, isn't it? He was a student of Dukas, and I think he wrote it to impress his teacher. And *Éscales*, too – it was

MASTERPIECES FROM THREE CENTURIES ON DELPHIAN



DCD34221

Beethoven: Works for Piano Four Hands
Peter Hill & Benjamin Frith

Delphian opens the celebrations for Beethoven year with this survey of everything the composer wrote for two pianists playing at one instrument: works from his early years in Bonn and from the period of the 'Eroica' Symphony, a decade later, are joined by a unique masterpiece from the year before his death. 'That there are but five works is surprising,' as Paul Driver comments in his *Sunday Times* review, 'but the fifth is the transcription Beethoven made – reluctantly yet at high intensity – of the Grosse Fuge. This new-fangled masterpiece leaps in track 22 like a tiger ...

and affords the joy of discovering what, and how, art really matters'

— *Sunday Times*, January 2020



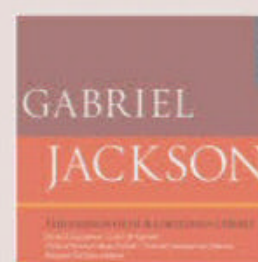
DCD34218

Kenneth Leighton: Sacred Choral Music
Choir of St Mary's Cathedral / Duncan Ferguson

Released to mark the ninetieth anniversary of the composer's birth, this programme of Kenneth Leighton's choral music reflects his outstanding accomplishments in the genre across his entire composing career: it includes Leighton's earliest and last pieces for unaccompanied choir, three Christmas carols, two extended masterpieces, and two works composed for the Choir of St Mary's Cathedral itself. Extensively praised under its current director of music Duncan Ferguson, the choir has both a historical affinity for this body of work and a sophisticated musicianship which here produces performances of focused maturity and depth.

'Taut, intelligent devotional works [...]

The performances are recognisably St Mary's: no-nonsense singing, highly disciplined yet projected to the back wall and laid over well-behaved adults with well-supported voices' — *Gramophone*, January 2020



DCD34222

Gabriel Jackson:

The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ
Emma Tring *soprano*, Guy Cutting *tenor*, Choir of Merton College, Oxford & Oxford Contemporary Sinfonia / Benjamin Nicholas

Described in *Choir & Organ* magazine's review as 'majestic and deeply moving', Gabriel Jackson's retelling of the age-old story of Christ's betrayal and crucifixion – commissioned by Merton College, Oxford – interweaves biblical narrative, Latin hymns and English poetry by Merton alumni, culminating in a rare setting of lines from T.S. Eliot's 'Little Gidding'. With soloists and instrumentalists handpicked by the composer, *The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ* receives here a performance to match the work's own harrowing drama and dark ecstasy.

BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE AWARDS 2020 – Choral shortlist

BEST ALBUMS OF 2019 – *Choir & Organ*, allmusic.com, MusicWeb

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conducted by Stokowski. It's a piece that shows off the modern orchestra.'

There's so much to talk about, and so far we've only covered two of Wilson's projects. There are no plans for the Sinfonia of London to give concerts, but the John Wilson Orchestra is now getting regular bookings across Europe, on top of its UK tours and unmissable annual appointment at the BBC Proms. We touch briefly on his long-cherished, still unrealised ambition to record a complete modern cycle of Gilbert and Sullivan's Savoy operas. The possibilities are endlessly fascinating: back in 2019 he performed *Trial by Jury* with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. 'We did it with cornets, pea-shooter trombones and wooden flutes, and everything as Sullivan would have heard it – but with a real spring in its step. I said to them, "You've got to articulate this music more than you think is socially acceptable."'

Meanwhile, still on the borderline of social acceptability – at least, with the more humourless kind of tastemaker – is another of Wilson's long-term passions: Eric Coates. The first disc in a projected series with the BBC Philharmonic for Chandos was released in September 2019, and I comment on how expressively the orchestra play this music – everything seemingly *con amore*. 'I've never done Coates without the players enjoying it, because it's so expertly written. There are composers all through history – from Schubert through to Paul McCartney – who have this gift of instantly memorable melody. Coates was single-minded: he'd chisel and polish away at his pieces for months. It's wonderful music, but you really have to get stuck in. It needs lots of accents, and it has to be quick enough. You have to take advantage of everything that it gives the players.'

There are no worries on that front from Wilson, who fell in love with Coates's music in his youth, and then took things to the next level by befriending the composer's son, Austin Coates (1922-97), and working to secure and preserve the original manuscript scores – restoring such details as the little trumpet echo after the waltz melody of *By the Sleepy Lagoon*. 'What was it that Charles Groves said? "A man would have to have a wooden heart not to step along to such music." It's the same with the music we play with the JWO. I was at school in the 1980s, and had no nostalgic associations with this material at all. It was way before my time. Pop music for me was Culture Club. So I've always thought of Coates as being alongside the canon of Western art music. It's as simple as that.'

The same rationale underlies one of Wilson's most personal ongoing projects – the Chandos series of music by Sir Richard Rodney Bennett, Wilson's friend and mentor, with whom, until



Endlessly fascinating possibilities: Wilson is excited about more light music projects

'With Gilbert and Sullivan's Savoy operas, you've got to articulate the music more than you think is socially acceptable'

new era. He believed passionately in Darmstadt and all that. It was later in his life that he felt, in his own words, that they'd thrown the baby out with the bathwater. His First Symphony is like Berg – it's impassioned atonal music, but written with such transparency, such clarity. That's because he knew how to handle the orchestra. Even little pieces like his Sinfonietta and his pieces for youth orchestras ... unless he was happy with the craftsmanship and the inspiration behind them, he didn't let them out.

'Richard's been dead seven years now. And this is my tribute to him, because if there was ever a composer who needed a discography, it's him. His music was completely forgotten about and yet it was written with such a serious command of composition, orchestration – everything. He was an absolute master – it almost came too easily to him. He always said that the different parts of his career were like different rooms in the same house, but I do think that in middle life he knocked some of those walls down. He never lost his melodic inspiration and intellectual rigour, and he found a style which assimilated all of those things.'

You could say exactly the same for Wilson's career – though whatever the genre in which he's working, one theme does remain a constant. Whether he's assembling a super-orchestra out of his address book, helping Austin Coates rescue his father's legacy, making plans with Ralph Couzens or simply paying tribute to a much-missed colleague and friend, music-making, for Wilson, is about friendship, about communication and about people. Perhaps that's why his performances feel so thrillingly alive, and at the same time so warm that it's as if they're talking to you personally. For all his energy, perfectionism and panache, there's nothing of the circus about Wilson. 'Light music is something I'm never going to give up,' he told me a couple of years back. 'I just adore it.' If the Sinfonia of London proves anything, it's that all music deserves to be made with that kind of love. **G** *John Wilson's new Sinfonia of London album is reviewed on page 30*



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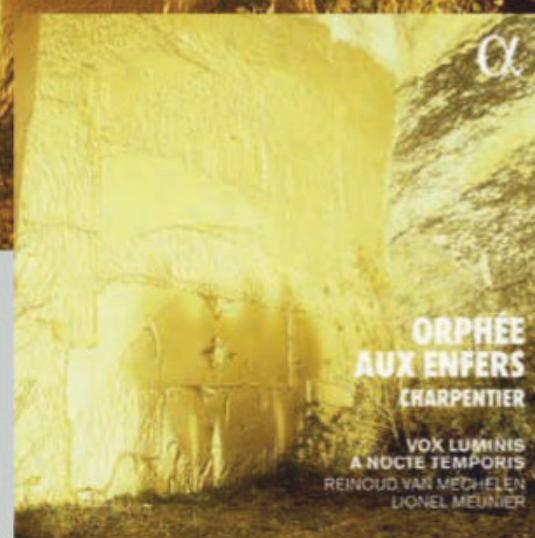


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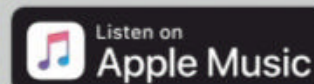
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Building a legacy

His approach to repertoire and tone may be 'old-school' but pianist Benjamin Grosvenor is leaving his mark for future generations, most recently with his recording of the Chopin concertos – Tim Parry catches up with him

Is there a finer British pianist than Benjamin Grosvenor? We can all play that game, of course, but it's interesting to note that the only other serious contenders are themselves huge fans of his playing. This might suggest that Grosvenor is a kind of 'pianists' pianist' – someone whose qualities appeal primarily to fellow professionals who will fully appreciate the skills and subtleties of his art. But Grosvenor's pianism shines more brightly than that. Indeed, the admiration of music lovers and record buyers is only reinforced by the knowledge that his fellow musicians recognise a unique and authentic talent.

Grosvenor is now 27, still young and with a long career ahead of him. So long ago did he come to widespread attention, when he won the piano category of the 2004 BBC Young Musician of the Year at the age of 11, that in some ways he seems older, and in some ways forever younger – especially for those whose lasting impression is the hopelessly out-of-date image of a prepubescent schoolboy playing the piano impossibly well.

The youngest of five brothers, he started learning with his piano-teacher mother in his sixth year; his natural ability quickly became apparent and he made astonishing progress. In 2001, Christopher Elton – then head of piano at the Royal Academy of Music in London – received an email out of the blue. It read: 'I have been teaching for 20 years and I now have a very young student who is by far the most wonderfully talented I have ever encountered – and what makes it more difficult to write is that this is also my son.' It was not uncommon for Elton to receive letters of recommendation, and he duly followed this up and arranged for the nine-year-old Grosvenor to play for him and his wife, fellow piano teacher Hilary Coates. Any possible scepticism was immediately quashed, as Elton recalls: 'As soon as Benjamin started playing (some Chopin and also a piece by Stephen Hough, if I remember correctly), we both looked at each other, realising this had some rare and extraordinary quality. He was hunched over the piano with raised shoulders – but there was a quality of "vision" even then that shone through all the technical limitations.'

Grosvenor began lessons with Coates, while Elton maintained a rather distant monitoring role. 'Increasingly we worked in tandem,' Elton continues, 'and things went in an extraordinary accelerating curve.' Grosvenor's success at the BBC Young Musician of the Year in 2004 was a natural progression. Footage of his performances in the piano final can be seen on YouTube: Balakirev's transcription of Glinka's song 'The Lark' reveals a gorgeous cultivation of a singing line, while Carl Vine's Bagatelles are played with a sense of character, colour and assurance that still astonishes. I found this breathtaking at the time, and I wasn't the only one. Noriko Ogawa was on the jury, and she recalls: 'Benjamin's music-making was not only beautiful and mature but there was a very refined form of sadness in the sound. If I were to boil it down to a single word, it would be "magical". His Carl Vine was particularly memorable.' Clare Hammond, then 18 and a fellow competitor, likewise remembers the event: 'I performed second out of five contestants that evening, and Benjamin was fourth, so I was able to pop back in and listen to him after I'd played. I remember seeing him walk out on stage and thinking that he looked even younger

than he was! But he didn't come across as a child who had been hothoused, rather as someone with a deep passion for and commitment to music.'

From this point, Elton assumed the principal role as Grosvenor's teacher, one he maintained for a decade, including the young pianist's four years at the Royal Academy of Music. Elton is keen to stress the significance of these later RAM years for Grosvenor: after a period of homeschooling, the interaction with his peers and the sheer wealth of musical richness he encountered were vitally important. During his early teenage years, Grosvenor's performances were strictly rationed so that he could concentrate on his education. He also signed a 'development contract' with EMI, an excellent initiative that enabled him to get some experience of studio conditions without any pressure to issue a record until he was ready. Unfortunately, this was a transitional time for EMI, as the label went through the difficulties that eventually led to its being acquired by Warner Classics, and no disc was forthcoming (although in 2009 Grosvenor did record some of the lesser-known pieces for EMI's 'Chopin: 200th Anniversary Edition'). Grosvenor had felt ready to record since he was about 15, and proposed various projects, yet the only album he made during this time was the privately issued 'This and That' (about which Bryce Morrison raved in *Gramophone*, 4/10). Once his EMI contract had expired when he turned 18, in July 2010, Grosvenor was quickly snapped up by Decca.

'Decca and I thought it was time to record a substantial repertoire-based album. The Chopin concertos felt right'

It's a mark of Grosvenor's stature and the careful handling of those around him (his parents, his teachers, his long-term agent James Brown at Hazard Chase) that he never acquired the label of 'child prodigy'. He was exactly that, of course, but it's far from the most interesting thing about him, and his musicianship has never been defined by his precocious childhood. Consequently, when Decca announced his signing there was absolutely no sense of commercial exploitation, weary scepticism or overfamiliarity. Paul Moseley was managing director of Decca Classics at the time and instrumental in signing Grosvenor, and he reflects: 'When I heard his private album "This and That" I was immediately struck by the "rightness" of the playing, the rhythmic subtlety and lack of sentimentality. Everything felt like it had an arc and a shape and knew where it was going. And he wasn't trying to show off, though his technique is as good as anyone's.'

Grosvenor's first Decca album, including Chopin's Scherzos and Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit* (10/11), won a *Gramophone* Award in 2012. After three further albums for Decca, he has now recorded the two Chopin concertos with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and conductor Elim Chan. It is more than three years since his last record appeared. When I meet Grosvenor for lunch in a Vietnamese cafe near his home, I ask why there has been such a gap between records. Characteristically, he defends the question with a straight bat. 'It's been a case of discussing what the next project would be, scheduling,



“It’s the first time I’ve heard the piano sound like a symphony orchestra with such detail, proximity, width and depth.”

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and finding the right circumstances and the right partnership.' If this begins like a politician's answer, he slowly fleshes out his thoughts. 'We wanted to make an album that was a statement in terms of repertoire. My recordings have all been quite mixed repertoire-wise, which has reflected the way I programme recitals. Both Decca and I thought it was time that I recorded something that was a substantial repertoire-based album. There was a lot of discussion about what that should be, so I suppose the gap has partly been down to finding the right project for both sides. The Chopin concertos felt right as I'd been playing them since I was very young. I played the Second when I was 12, and the First when I was 13 or 14.' Shades of Evgeny Kissin there. 'Yes,' he smiles, 'although I play them very differently from Kissin. In fact, I play them very differently now from how I did when I was a teenager.'

There are, of course, many fine recordings of the Chopin concertos, and Grosvenor is aware that some would prefer him to record repertoire that's less often played. I mention the Moszkowski Piano Concerto, which Grosvenor proposed to EMI when he was about 15. Did he ever get around to learning it?

'No, I didn't. It's a huge amount of work, with no guarantee of many performances.' This strikes at the nub of the problem, at least in concerto repertoire. Pianists are beholden to orchestras and concert promoters, who themselves need to attract audiences. The more obscure the repertoire the greater the risk. Grosvenor agrees, and adds: 'As a young pianist getting to play with a major orchestra in a major hall, it could be seen as something of a missed opportunity to play something unfamiliar where it's going to be harder for people to form a judgement on your playing.' None of these things helps in the advocacy of lesser-known concertos, although Grosvenor points out that he is passionate about reviving more obscure repertoire in his recital programmes. Indeed, his programme-building and repertoire choices are quite old-school in a manner that is entirely in keeping with his overall style of pianism, with its emphasis on line, colour and sonority.

Grosvenor has always been interested in old recordings. I ask whose versions of the Chopin concertos he grew up with. 'My first exposure to them might actually have been the Kissin recording,' Grosvenor says. 'I was about the same age when learning them, and at the time I was something of a fan. Then later I discovered Alfred Cortot's recording of No 2 and then Josef Hofmann's and Arthur Rubinstein's. Then I heard more unusual recordings like Noel Mewton-Wood in No 1, which he



plays in a very Mozartian way. I heard a wide variety of different recordings and different approaches during my teenage years. This reinforced to me that this is music that you can play in very different ways.'

This provokes a thought that I quickly realise is out of place. I wonder whether the possibilities for showing yourself interpretatively in Chopin's concertos, beyond in a generalised way, are rather constrained. Grosvenor is genuinely surprised. 'I used to think this about the Grieg Concerto, which I was interested in recording at one point. But I don't feel that about the Chopin concertos. It's true, though, that a lot of what

you can do with these pieces is quite subtle, to do with timing, for example. I think this applies to the orchestral playing, too. I like the way that Elim Chan gets the orchestra to play in quite a lean way, more towards a classical conception, whereas sometimes the orchestral writing can feel quite bogged down. For the pianist, there is a fine balance in Chopin: if you play it completely straight it just doesn't breathe, but go too far the other way and there is so much scope for wilful distortion.'

Chan is only a few years older than Grosvenor

himself, and in 2014 became the first female winner of the Donatella Flick LSO Conducting Competition. I ask how this partnership came about. 'We played Chopin's Second Concerto with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra [of which Chan is Principal Guest Conductor] and we got on really well. Conducting these pieces requires a very particular skill to follow the flexibility that Chopin needs. She's a wonderful musician and very gifted at that. It takes a really good conductor to make the music sound completely convincing in the *tuttis*: it's not the

best orchestral writing and it requires work and patience – some conductors just aren't particularly interested. It felt very easy performing with her in concert and again in the recording sessions.

When you're listening back and choosing takes, you realise how grateful you are to have a conductor with that kind of sensitivity.'

The respect is mutual. Chan tells me how much she loved their collaboration. I ask her what singles Grosvenor out as an artist. 'I think what makes him so special is his intelligence and his grace. He is so calm yet so strong, with such a powerful musical mind. Our performance of the Second Concerto was the first time I'd conducted Chopin, and we discussed the music in a lot of detail and the approach we wanted for the piece as a whole, including the orchestra. Benjamin introduced me to the Cortot recording, which opened my mind to many possibilities.'



Top: Grosvenor aged 12. Bottom: performing Mozart with François-Xavier Roth in 2017

'When you're choosing takes, you realise how grateful you are to have a conductor like Chan – with that kind of sensitivity'



It's refreshing, I suggest, when two young artists so clearly enjoy exploring musical possibilities and bouncing ideas off each other. Chan agrees: 'It's unusual for a pianist to care so much about how to shape the orchestral expositions, how to approach the orchestral writing and the piece as a whole.' Chan also highlights a feature of Grosvenor's musical identity that, for me, strikes at the heart of the matter:

'Benjamin very much sees himself as part of a living tradition. He cares deeply about old recordings, and that sense of pianistic tradition is evident in the way that he plays and the sound he makes. He's a pianist who really thinks about sonority and texture.'

The same themes recur when other conductors who have developed strong working relationships with Grosvenor talk about him. François-Xavier Roth, too, mentions his 'gorgeous sound and care for sonority', and adds that 'with the mixture of honesty and deep musical engagement, without ever merely showing off, this all helps to make him one of the most exciting pianists around'. Roth has performed Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms with Grosvenor, and he thinks that this focus on Classical works 'helps to give his music-making a healthy sense of structure, even in Romantic repertoire', something that certainly applies to the forthcoming Chopin recording. Sir Mark Elder stresses the freshness of Grosvenor's approach: 'With Benjamin there is no sense of routine or convention, no sense that this is the way it has to be; he is always creative. There is something unalloyed about his playing that comes from his own sense of fantasy, a rare emotional and musical freedom.'

Last November, the violinist Thomas Gould toured with Grosvenor and Britten Sinfonia, playing Bach and Mozart



Chopin concerto sessions at RSNO Centre New Auditorium, Glasgow, August 4 and 5, 2019

concertos, and it was, as Gould tells me, a positive experience: 'Benjamin's manner with the orchestra is perfect – flexible and respectful but always with a few suggestions up his sleeve so that repeated performances never feel stale. His playing is incredibly elegant and refined, and he really does play chamber music with his colleagues. He's a very easy and harmonious collaborator!'

One thing all these artists mention is the maturity of Grosvenor's musicianship. This is pretty much the only acknowledgement of his youth. But it does make me wonder whether Grosvenor wishes he had made more records.

'When I was with EMI I think I was probably too young to make a major-label splash,' he says modestly before almost immediately contradicting himself; 'but then I did make "This and That", and I suppose that could have been such a thing.' I suspect he's thinking not of his playing, but of the inevitable publicity, something he accepts goes with the territory but I sense he still isn't entirely comfortable with.

What about Chopin's concertos? Given that he's played them since he was as young as 12, could he have recorded these sooner? Or might there have been a risk that he'd want to re-record them? Grosvenor pauses to think. 'That is a risk,' he begins hesitantly. 'But when I listen back to my playing of Chopin at that young age, sometimes it has a unique quality – there's a kind of innocence that one has at that age that's very hard to recapture. My recording of the D flat Nocturne, Op 27 No 2, which is on "This and That", is absolutely fine, but then I listen back to the audience recording from Wigmore Hall when I was 12, and it's really quite something. I'm almost afraid to play that piece now because I feel like I'm competing with my

12-year-old self. That's partly down to the piece itself, which in many ways feels pivotal for me – I think it was my playing of this nocturne that first interested Christopher Elton in teaching me.'

Elton singles out this same performance: 'I well remember his post-competition lunchtime recital at Wigmore Hall some months after the BBC Young Musician finals as being quite extraordinary – not just for a 12-year-old. His Chopin D flat Nocturne was genuinely one of the most beautiful piano performances I can remember. It had a quite uncanny sense of catching a bygone era of the great pianists and of achieving a remarkable freedom of inspiration and spirit without in any way losing stability or structure – like some inspired improvisation. And, of course, a totally unteachable quality!' This audience recording has circulated among collectors, and is an extraordinary document.

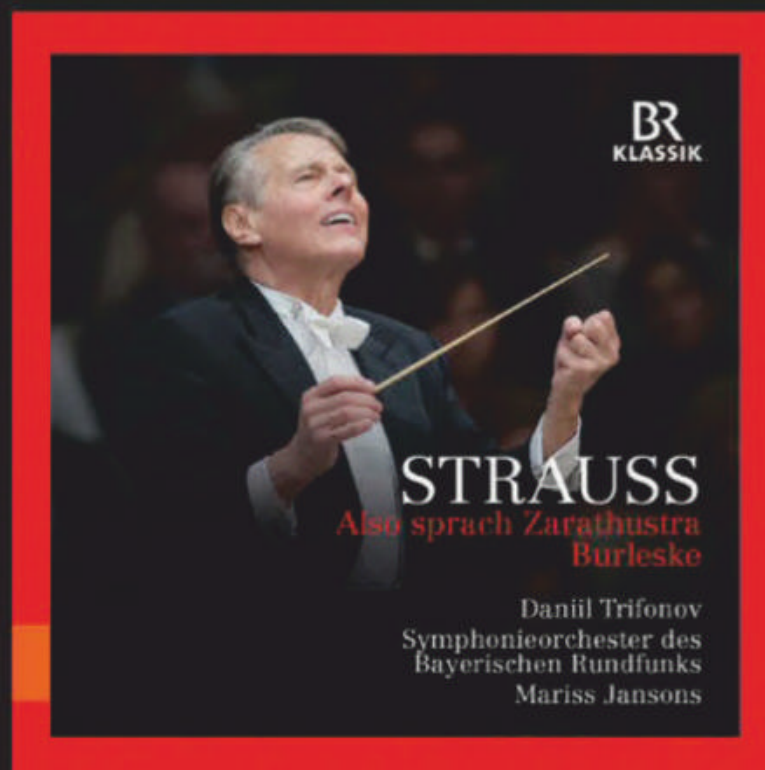
'He cares deeply about old recordings, and that sense of pianistic tradition is evident in his playing' – Elim Chan, RSNO conductor

So what of the future? Are there more concertos in the pipeline? How about Rachmaninov? 'I've played No 2. I'd like to play No 3, but it's a big learn. It's something I should have had running in the background when I was a teenager. It would have been easier to learn it then, and now it's hard to find the time. It's important to try to learn these things before they're actually needed.' This reminds me of something Stephen Hough says in his recent book *Rough Ideas* (A/19): if he were to give one piece of advice to student pianists it would be to 'learn concertos before you have to, and learn them well'. Grosvenor nods sagely. 'I'm doing Prokofiev's Third in 2021,' he says, 'and that's probably my next big learn for a concerto.' We discuss other major works, and I'm reminded of both the sheer vastness of the concerto repertoire and how much more learning Grosvenor has ahead of him. He's played Brahms's D minor Concerto a lot, but hasn't yet played No 2. He's not fussed about performing Tchaikovsky's First ('enough people play it'), but would like to do the Second. He's not yet played Beethoven's Fourth and Fifth, and would like to learn Bartók's Third and more Saint-Saëns. No wonder the Moszkowski never made it into his fingers.

It isn't entirely clear how the relationship with Decca will develop – the new Chopin disc fulfils Grosvenor's initial contract of five albums. He is full of ideas about things he'd like to record, and enjoys discussing potential projects and interesting repertoire. We talk about Schumann's *Kreisleriana* and *Humoreske*, Liszt's B minor Sonata and opera paraphrases, Granados's complete *Goyescas*, and a number of more esoteric things, but these are all music-led projects of the sort that Decca has tended to move away from. Perhaps Grosvenor doesn't fit with the profile of the label's recent intake of young artists, who are more obviously suited to the kind of promotion that thrives in today's social-media-influenced world. He is essentially a very private person. He is also by some distance the best pianist Decca has. For a label that hails the diversity of its young artists, surely a musician of the nature and calibre of Grosvenor – whose recordings will be listened to long after others have ceased to be relevant – should have a place on any such varied and inclusive roster. Either way, he won't be short of offers or options. As Moseley says, 'Benjamin will be fêted as one of the greats by future generations.'

Our review of Grosvenor's new Chopin album will appear in March

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JUMPING *between repertoires*

James Jolly meets the mezzo-soprano Kate Lindsey in Vienna to talk about her work on stage and in the recording studio as she releases her second solo album for Alpha Classics

Among the many obituaries for Jessye Norman last autumn, one bon mot by the diva surfaced with remarkable frequency: 'Pigeonholes are only comfortable for pigeons.' It's a sentiment that finds sympathy with many singers, and of those singers I suspect a large number would be mezzos. 'I wonder whether from a practical standpoint, and especially for lyric mezzos, we have to get creative about what we sing and about where we go,' reflected Kate Lindsey one morning last December. 'It's quite easy to corner ourselves into a very specific repertoire which could become very limiting. So, if we're able to open ourselves up to other possibilities, and other ways of using the voice, we have lots more opportunities.' And this possessor of a glorious mezzo voice – warm and glowing but without the contralto colours of some of her colleagues, flexible and capable of carrying considerable intensity – has certainly been opening herself to many possibilities.

Consider her schedule for 2019-20. Starting in June last year, Lindsey sang Prince Charming in Massenet's *Cendrillon* at Glyndebourne. Then came the Composer in Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* at the Staatsoper in Vienna, followed (after about two months of rehearsals) by the title-role in the world premiere – at the same house – of Olga Neuwirth's Virginia Woolf opera, *Orlando*. Then comes Nerone in Handel's *Agrippina* at New York's Met alongside Joyce DiDonato, and finally, taking us to the end of May this year, Mélisande in Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* in Los Angeles. It's a busy 12 months, and from a repertoire point of view, it's almost impossible to pigeonhole.

Lindsey had just sung the first of five performances of Neuwirth's new opera when we met. 'It's hard to believe that we opened last night, a Sunday night, and in two weeks I'll be in New York,' she confesses. 'I came to Vienna at the end of September because I did *Ariadne auf Naxos* and then went straight into rehearsals for *Orlando*. So, we will have been here three months.' It's a tough life, made considerably easier, she's very happy to reveal, by the fact that her husband and two-year-old son are with her during the eight months of the year that she's away from home. 'We decided to do it all together, which is a huge gift as we have a semblance of a normal family life. I have to say that during this period working on *Orlando* it's been a real saving grace because it's been a very intense process

and filled with constant questions and changes. *Orlando*'s a big, big piece and to be able to come home at the end of the day, and be able to switch off and engage with something else – it means I can let go.'

For *Orlando*, Lindsey was on stage almost without pause for the work's two and three-quarter hours, and the production was extremely complex – though stunning to look at – with some highly energetic demands, not to mention a vocal line that must have been incredibly difficult to learn. 'In the last weeks, with the stage and technical rehearsals moved to the main stage, so many new layers were added, and we had no idea what it was going to look like right up until a couple of weeks ago. Also, we hadn't got into costume and we had to adjust a lot of the staging once we had fitted ourselves into these pieces because they're

quite structural and often quite heavy. And then when the orchestra came in it was so, so different from what we'd had during rehearsals. We'd used the electronic samples in the rehearsal room

but I had to go back so many times to the score and listen to some of the stage rehearsal tapes with orchestra because some of the cues from the piano and vocal score were just not there. All of a sudden, I was searching for notes that I never ever had to worry about in the rehearsal room. I was thinking, "How am I going to find these notes?" And this was just three or four days ago. I'd suddenly realise that a cue I knew was played by the percussion, and it wasn't going to give me the note!'

When the five performances of the Neuwirth opera were over – and Lindsey was singled out by the critics ('a stupendous account of the title role', wrote *The New Yorker*'s Alex Ross, while *The Observer*'s Fiona Maddocks praised her for singing, 'outstandingly, the marathon of a title role') – she and her family would be off to New York for a major gear change to a Handel opera. 'To go from *Orlando* to *Agrippina* will be quite a tough transition, mentally and energetically, because I just have a day of travel, one day to settle in and then straight into rehearsals – so that's hard. Then we have six weeks of rehearsals, and that really gives you time to put a role into your body. But when offers come in, I really have to consider the amount of time I need to study because I don't enjoy learning roles when I'm singing something else. It can really pull me in different directions; sometimes they can balance out a bit but not that often! I like a bit of breathing room.'

'Going from Neuwirth's Orlando to Handel's Agrippina is quite a tough transition, mentally and energetically'

And in common with an increasing number of her mezzo colleagues – Anne Sofie von Otter and DiDonato spring to mind – she slips between repertoires with ease. ‘It’s interesting to go from the Baroque to, say, Richard Strauss – and if you believe what you were told when you were a student, you then stand back and say, “I’m not even sure I’m allowed to do this!” I think the embracing of Baroque opera has definitely opened up the repertoire a lot. As a result, you’re constantly rebalancing and, in a way, it makes you stronger. You realise your limitations are most often in your mind, first and foremost.’

Kate Lindsey, Virginia-born, an alumna of Indiana University and a graduate of the Metropolitan Opera’s Lindemann Young Artist Development Program, has made her home in the UK following 10 years living in New York. ‘I moved to London just after the *Ariadne* at Glyndebourne at the end of 2013,’ she explains. ‘I was in a big state of transition in my life at that point. I’d been married and sadly that hadn’t worked out, and it was a bit of a dark time, so I thought, “All right, do I go back to New York where I did my training and where I’ve lived for 10 years, or do I try something else?” A friend who was living there said, “Give London a try!” I looked at my schedule and thought that, if I wanted to try this out, being in Europe would make a lot of sense over the next year because I had a lot of work there. So I gave it a shot and within two months I knew it was exactly where I needed, and *wanted*, to be. If you’re an American singer in Europe and you have five days off you just can’t go home to America. It’s not quite enough time. Whereas if you live in London you can manage to get home for a few days. And I was really seeking that level of breathing room.’

Now based in Brighton (very handy for Glyndebourne!), Lindsey lives with her husband, the acclaimed film-maker Olly Lambert (whose documentaries, covering subjects including heroin addiction, the Afghan war, conflict in Syria and Gaza and Jimmy Saville, belie his infectious sense of humour), and their two-year-old son. ‘What I like about London, and the UK in general, as opposed to New York, where I lived for a long time, is that within the artistic community there are very porous boundaries – someone who works in theatre, or even in movies, will know something about music, or even have an interest in investigating it a bit. And I feel this fluidity between directors within the theatre world who move into opera – there’s a real value to the way these worlds collide. So you’ve someone like Fiona Shaw who comes and



As Orlando in Vienna – costume by Comme des Garçons

where she was less secure vocally but you could always tap into the human within the music, and that’s most attractive for me as I listen to other artists. I want to hear that humanity, something that would knock me in the gut. When I watched VHS tapes of her as the Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos* I would just cry in the end because there was something about her that was filled with yearning, vulnerability and fear as well as a real power.’

Lindsey records for Alpha Classics, the company led by Didier Martin, a man of considerable taste and with a proven ear for musical excellence. He’d heard her sing Mozart with Jérémie Rhorer in Paris and clearly wanted to collaborate, but when they met to discuss repertoire – Lindsey geared up for something ‘very classical’ – he sprung a surprise question: ‘Have you thought about Kurt Weill?’ And then, displaying the kind of insight that characterises inspired A&R, he connected her with the jazz pianist Baptiste Trotignon. (‘As soon as we started to talk I realised that Kate and I shared

a vision,’ Martin recalls.) The result was ‘Thousands of Miles’, a collection of music by Weill, Zemlinsky, Korngold and Alma Mahler, of which Tim Ashley wrote in these pages, ‘We’re reminded on occasion of [Teresa] Stratas, though Lindsey’s stylistic range is wider, veering from classical grandeur in Alma Mahler’s extravagant “Hymne” to the *disease* growl she adopts for “Denn wie man sich bettet, so liegt man”,’ and he praised singing of ‘wonderful understatement and great emotional perception’.



Recording with Jonathan Cohen’s group Arcangelo at St Augustine’s, Kilburn

Now, once again refusing to be thrust into any pigeonhole, Lindsey leaps back about three centuries to give us the album 'Arianna', which juxtaposes pieces about Arianna/Ariadne – abandoned on the island of Naxos by Theseus, the man she'd helped to destroy the Minotaur – by Alessandro Scarlatti (*L'Arianna*) and Haydn (*Arianna a Naxos*). And in between comes Handel's cantata *Ah, crudel, nel pianto mio*, which explores, more abstractly, the theme of the abandoned lover. 'The starting place was the Haydn – I knew I wanted to do that. I know what I like in text, sound and colour. I generally start from the words and I like to know that I can identify with the character. I was looking for pieces where I felt I could really sink my teeth into sounds and expression, and take risks wherever possible.'

Her musical partners on the album are Arcangelo and its director Jonathan Cohen, and they also had assistance from Arcangelo's librarian James Halliday, who tracked down the orchestration of Haydn's *Arianna a Naxos* by Sigismund Neukomm, a pupil of the composer. 'On the first day, we rehearsed the Haydn and that's the biggest ensemble on the recording. Johnny introduced the piece and everyone was a bit like, "Okay, we'll see how it goes ...". But we got started and there was a real shifting point when things began to get dramatic. Things were on the verge of really losing control but we were inviting the loss of control and everyone sort of went, "Wow! This is going to be something that's not calculated but really spontaneous." We all felt it! After we recorded it a couple of days later, Johnny said to me, "I just couldn't get to sleep. I was on such a high from that." And nobody had expected that from the Neukomm edition of the piece.'

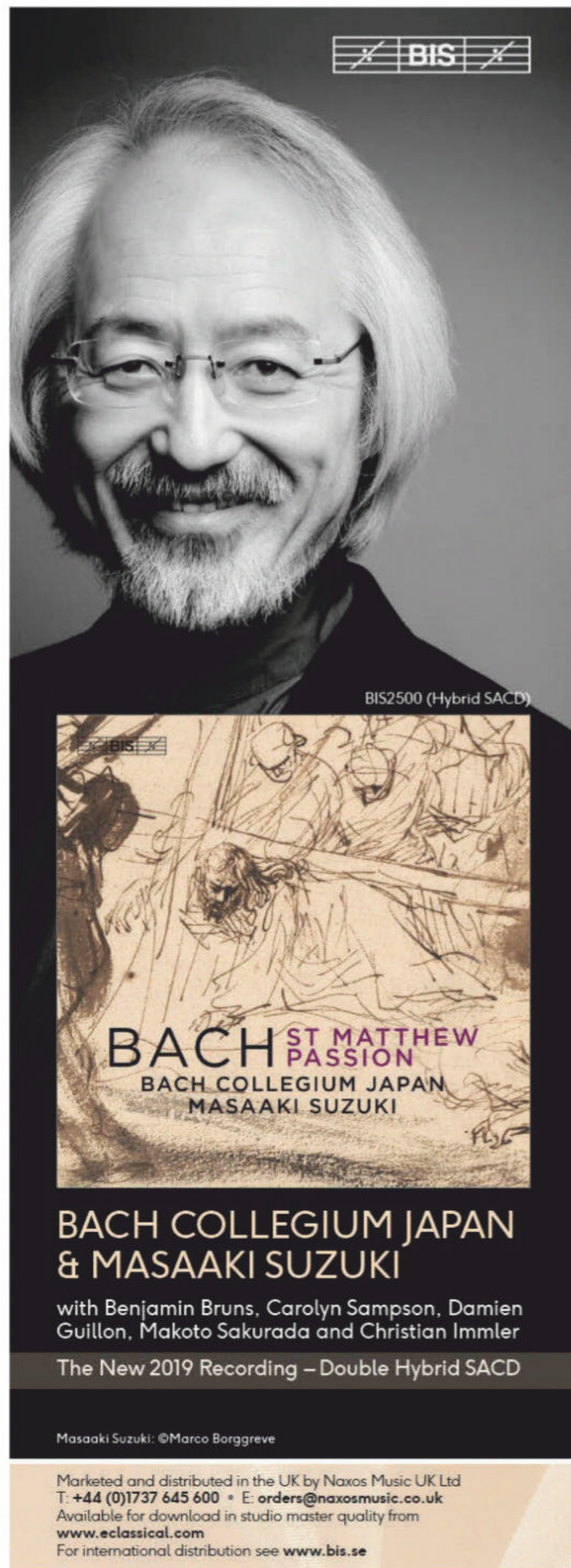
'I don't ever think, "Oh, I'm the soloist and I'm doing my solo and you're just playing for me" – that feels so empty to me'

With the Haydn as a cornerstone, the album needed to take form. 'I remember when we were choosing the pieces, I just knew there was something about Handel's *Ah, crudel* that made a connection with me in terms of its sound and what it's doing. It doesn't feel like the typical Handel cantatas that we hear all the time. And I'm much more drawn to pieces where I know I'm connecting with the other musicians. I don't ever think, "Oh, I'm the soloist and I'm doing my solo and you're just playing for me" – that feels so empty to me. The rhythmic stuff, and the dialogues with the wind instruments, is what I love in this piece. And then Johnny and I were talking about what else we could pull into this and James sent us some suggestions. As soon as I looked at the Scarlatti I knew that was the third piece. I don't know how other people create albums, but I'm constantly looking out for the seed, what's going to be the central thing that holds it and around which we build.'

Having a film-maker as a husband has one a great advantage for a singer. The sessions for 'Arianna', which took place in the striking surroundings of St Augustine's in Kilburn, north London, have been captured in a beautiful and highly evocative little film made by Lambert, and the spirit of laughter-infused collaboration between the members of Cohen's Arcangelo and this enormously engaging singer simply leaps from the screen. **G**

You can watch Ollly Lambert's film made at the London recording sessions on the Gramophone website

► To read our review of Kate Lindsey's 'Arianna' recording, go to page 74



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GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Tim Ashley applauds a thrilling album of French orchestral works from John Wilson and his newly re-formed orchestra, the Sinfonia of London



'Escales'

'French Orchestral Works'

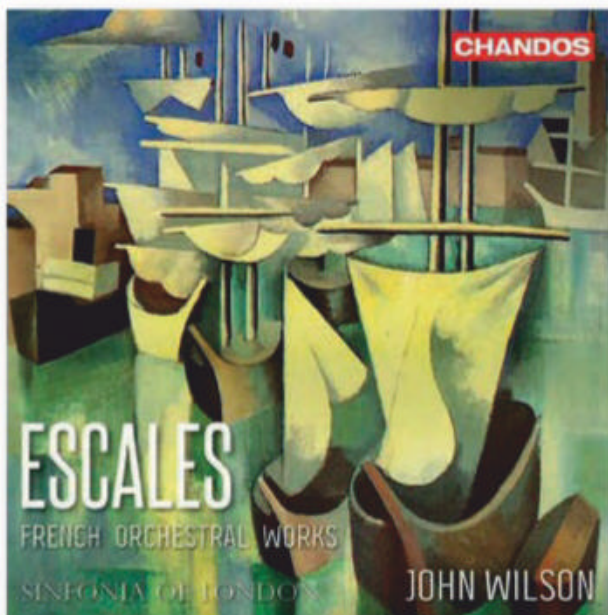
Chabrier España **Debussy** Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune **Duruflé** Trois Danses, Op 6 **Ibert** Escales ... **Massenet** Thaïs - Méditation **Ravel** Rapsodie espagnole **Saint-Saëns** Le rouet d'Omphale, Op 31

Sinfonia of London / John Wilson

Chandos ② CHSA5252 (79' • DDD/DSD)

'Let's hope it's not a one-off', wrote Richard Bratby at the close of his review (10/19) of John Wilson's recording of Korngold's Symphony in F, with the Sinfonia of London, which takes its name from the much-admired 1950s recording orchestra, and which Wilson, long keen on its revival, effectively re-founded in 2018, hand-picking its members from among the UK's best musicians. Those concerned that it genuinely might be a 'one-off' can indeed relax, given that we now have the first of its successors in the form of this exhilarating, if very different disc of French orchestral music, familiar or otherwise, from either side of the turn of the 20th century.

The programme is beautifully put together, so that we not only get a coherent overview of the period but seem to hear each piece refracted through its companions. Taking its title from Ibert's impressions of his lengthy honeymoon trip to Italy, Tunisia and Spain, 'Escales' means 'ports of call', and the emphasis falls squarely on the influence of the exotic on the *fin de siècle* French imagination. The attraction embraced not only Spain and North Africa (Massenet's *Thaïs*, represented here by the famous 'Méditation', is set in Alexandria), but also classical Greece (the juxtaposition of Debussy's *Faune* with Saint-Saëns's *Le rouet d'Omphale* is telling in



'The enthusiasm Wilson elicits from his orchestra is apparent on every track, though what really impresses is the finesse'

this context) and even Provence, in the energetic 'Tambourin' that brings Duruflé's *Trois Danses* of 1932 to their close.

The inclusion of *España* and *Faune*, strategically placed at the disc's opening and midpoint respectively, inevitably

stresses the seminal influence of each.

Both Ravel's *Rapsodie espagnole* and Ibert's evocation of Valencia, the last of his 'ports of call', are unthinkable without the former; *Faune* hovers not only over the dreamy flute solo with which *Escales* ... itself opens, but also over the woodwind-writing of Duruflé's moody, somewhat eclectic *Danses*, which also betray a considerable debt to his teacher Dukas, most notably in the swaying *Apprenti sorcier* chords with which they open. An attractive work that grows on you with repeated hearings, the *Danses* will be something of a discovery for many, though it's also wonderful to have a new recording of *Omphale*, which has been rather neglected of late.

Wilson, meanwhile, has the ability to make familiar music sound wonderfully fresh and new-minted, all the while carefully judging and calibrating the sound world of each piece. *España*, taken at a considerable lick and done with breathtaking panache – above all from the brass and strings – bristles with excitement without losing sight of its impertinent

sensuality. *Faune*, the flute solo ravishly played by Adam Walker, is tensely erotic rather than languid or protracted, and the *Thaïs* 'Méditation', opening serenely and purged of any hint of sentimentality, gradually becomes turbulent and anguished as it proceeds, reminding us that it depicts spiritual crisis rather than rapt contemplation. *Omphale*, meanwhile, is simply tremendous as Hercules' theme rises fiercely through the surrounding woodwind mockery and whirring string figurations, more in rage than the usual resentment.

The enthusiasm that Wilson elicits from his orchestra is very much apparent on every track,



Orchestral revival: John Wilson has re-founded the Sinfonia of London



Wonderfully fresh and new-minted: John Wilson combines brilliance and élan with sensuous grace in the music of fin de siècle France

though what really impresses is the finesse as well as the virtuosity of the playing, the refinement of detail, the subtlety of texture and colour. Ibert's *Escales ...*, another much underrated work, sounds particularly beguiling in its mixture of Impressionism and urbanity. Sweeping strings in the opening movement usher in a breathtaking, almost widescreen panorama of the Mediterranean shimmering off the coast of Sicily. A sultry oboe solo seems to unwind into infinity over the gentle tap of *col legno* and pizzicato strings in Ibert's central depiction of the Tunisian desert, and the mercurial finale, by turns sardonic, urbane and festive, has tremendous dexterity and wit.

Though Ibert clearly learnt much from Ravel, the contrast with *Rapsodie espagnole*

is striking. The latter is superbly done here, with every shift in mood finely delineated: 'Prélude à la nuit' is at once sensuous and eerie; the 'Habanera' is exquisite in its languor and grace; and the 'Feria' dazzles with its brilliance and élan. Duruflé's *Trois Danses*, meanwhile, swerve ambivalently between nostalgic lyricism and grandeur until the startling, jazz-inflected 'Tambourin' insistently sweeps its ambiguities away. Everything is beautifully captured in an immaculately engineered recording, at once ideally spacious and vivid. It's a wonderful disc. I gather, meanwhile, that Wilson and the Sinfonia of London have recordings of works by Respighi and Dutilleux in the pipeline, and I look forward to them with eager anticipation. **G**

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



David Threasher listens to some of Mozart's earliest symphonies:

'Some of the slow movements, especially, display a depth and sensitivity that eluded composers four or five times his age' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 40**



Richard Whitehouse explores an album of Raminta Serkšnytė:

'Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla relishes the acute contrasts as the music's earlier anguish becomes progressively diffused' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 44**

Barber • Tchaikovsky

Barber Violin Concerto, Op 14

Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, Op 35

Johan Dalene *vn* **Norrköping Symphony**

Orchestra / Daniel Blendulf

BIS (F) BIS2440 (59' • DDD/DSD)



Gramophone has already singled out this young man as One to Watch (8/19)

and from the shaping of his solo entrance in the Tchaikovsky alone there's a 'presence' about Johan Dalene's playing that announces a musician of special sensibilities. It's amazing how quickly one can tell.

I guess the most striking thing about this young Swedish player – a mere 19 years old – is the complete absence of showiness or indeed any sense of virtuosity on display. He is the most honest of brokers in the Tchaikovsky. Rubato is sparingly used and his attention to dynamics (a big tool in his armoury) speaks volumes even when it doesn't, if you catch my drift. The artless way in which the first movement's second subject sings is a case in point – and when we come to the cadenza his super-subtle shadings illuminate phrases that have long been taken for granted. It's playing that genuinely draws you in and keeps you on the edge of your seat. The second-movement Canzonetta is possessed of an inwardness that is quietly special, the melody at one point suddenly whispered as if sharing 'in confidence' its lonely soulfulness.

Notice that I have not drawn attention to the brilliance of Dalene's playing – and it is brilliant, though more in its articulation (no smudged or 'cheated' figurations here) than its fireworks per se. Some might be looking for a more red-blooded earthiness or flamboyance in this piece – what you might call swagger or 'temperament' – but its nimble-fingered directness is no less exciting in its way.

The Barber really suits Dalene. I always think of the opening as conveying a sense of our having joined it in the middle of an intimate conversation – and he compounds that feeling with his confidential manner. He and his like-minded conductor – the excellent Daniel Blendulf – deliver a thoroughly coherent and embraceable view of the piece with the soloist in the best sense an integrated part of the orchestral fabric (particularly so in the first movement). Dalene's compatriots, the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra, play with equal freshness throughout and, mindful of the nod to Brahms, I must single out the first oboe, who gets first bite of that gorgeous slow-movement melody. When Dalene finally gets his turn it is testament to a maturity way beyond his years that he comes close to breaking your heart with it. His future is bright indeed.

Edward Seckerson

Beamish • Jolas • Neuwirth

'Stories'

Beamish Trumpet Concerto^a **Jolas** Histoires

vraies^b **Neuwirth** ... miramondo multiplo ...^c

Håkan Hardenberger *tpt* ^b**Roger Muraro** *pf*

^{bc}**Malmö Symphony Orchestra**; ^a**National Youth**

Orchestra of Scotland / Martyn Brabbins

BIS (F) BIS2293 (61' • DDD/DSD)



Sally Beamish's Trumpet Concerto (2003) was inspired by Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. Of course you would choose a trumpet – over a pastoral violin – to shimmy and slide into the speakeasies and alleyways of a sordid urban landscape. It's a measure of Håkan Hardenberger's playing, though, that his trumpet is always so much more – as in the arias of Olga Neuwirth's ... *miramondo multiplo* ... and the sedated beast of Betsy Jolas's *Histoires vraies*.

Jolas's piece is the most beautiful, a 'suite concertante' for trumpet, piano and orchestra from 2003 that sounds a lot older than it is, weaving a distilled through-line

through fidgety corners and open spaces before slamming itself shut. It is a score that demands you cock your ear towards it – Hardenberger's *pianissimo* playing and all – and suggests as much by launching with a tune-up and a round of applause. The Malmö Symphony Orchestra under Martyn Brabbins glisten, exhale and patter like a snoozing Fafner.

The Beamish is a showpiece in comparison, not quite as fresh or free from rhetoric but evocative of the city's shabby beauty and pleasing in its commandeering of set intervals for each movement, which it uses as architectural building blocks. The clockwork mechanism of the finale tickles the senses as a classic concerto does, ditto the passacaglia-like tread of the central *Andante*.

Neuwirth's piece is a trickier prospect – the booklet note, either confused or badly translated, introduces a 'confrontation' before dismissing any idea of a confrontation. We hear five 'airs' for trumpet and orchestra built on the concept of 'careful listening' but the score doesn't invite much of that, and the fresh air of Hardenberger's floated cadenza suddenly cleanses, alerting you to clutter elsewhere. The rate of ideas-per-minute is high but, as Jolas's work proves, there is immense power when a good number of those ideas conceal themselves. **Andrew Mellor**

Beethoven

Five Piano Concertos

Ronald Brautigam *fp*

Cologne Academy / Michael Alexander Willens

BIS (F) (2) BIS2274 (157' • DDD/DSD)



Ronald Brautigam's first recording of Beethoven's piano concertos, a

collaboration with Andrew Parrott and the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra, appeared in 2008-10. Included were Brautigam's reconstruction of the early Concerto, WoO4, the B flat Rondo, the



Special sensibilities: Johan Dalene impresses in his debut recording of Barber and Tchaikovsky violin concertos

Violin Concerto transcription and the *Choral Fantasy*. Though Brautigam had already embarked on a project of recording Beethoven's complete piano music using the fortepiano, he played a modern Steinway for the concertos. However, in this new two-disc set of the five numbered concertos, Brautigam has chosen two fortepianos by Paul McNulty. For the first three concertos, he uses a replica of a Walter & Sohn instrument from 1805; for the last two, a replica of an 1819 Conrad Graf. His collaborators are the Kölner Akademie under Michael Alexander Willens, partners for his recordings of the Mozart solo concertos.

These splendid performances, and the sophistication with which the BIS engineers have captured them, are fresh and invigorating. Textures are bracingly lean, with a lightness and transparency that seems airborne. The winds have an irresistibly gnarly pungency, while horns and trumpets speak with golden, full-bodied resonance. These robust wind-band sonorities juxtaposed with the agility of gut strings provide more than a backdrop for the silvery sounds of the fortepiano; they create a living, verdant environment through which the soloist sings, dances, wanders, cavorts and declaims with

abandon. Given the innate dynamic of the classical concerto form, the ensemble here approaches the ideal of chamber music.

The tempos are fleet, a notch or two above the norm. The simpler action of the fortepiano compared to modern instruments, combined with its shallow key dip, makes greater speed possible, even desirable, without sacrificing clarity. And, of course, early 19th-century pianos don't sustain sound as long as modern ones, suggesting that slow passages move more quickly than they might on a Steinway. Far from being limitations, however, these qualities are simply different. If total timings are generally crude indicators of tempo, comparison of the first movement of the *Emperor* Concerto nevertheless gives an idea. Brautigam/Willens clocks in at 18'55", Lisiecki/ASMF (DG, 11/19) 20'14", Goode/Iván Fischer (Nonesuch, 2/09) 19'54" and Schnabel/Galliera (1946 – Testament, 3/94) 19'10". The *Andante* of this G major Concerto (No 4) is even more striking, unfolding in a relatively brisk 3'37". Brautigam's engagement of the *una corda* throughout, as Beethoven specified, lends the movement a new dimension of hushed pathos.

There's nothing pompous or heavy-handed in these readings. Both Brautigam

and Willens are alive to Beethoven's every indication on the page, and that most precious of all commodities in music, the life of the phrase, is sacrosanct. Original, stylish and authoritative, this concerto set is a worthy and thought-provoking contribution to the recordings marking the Beethoven year.

Patrick Rucker

Selected comparison:

Brautigam, Norrköping SO, Parrott (A/08, 9/09, 2/10, A/10) (BIS) BIS-SACD1692, 1693, 1792, 1793 (oas)

Beethoven

Symphony No 9, 'Choral', Op 125

Ann-Helen Moen *sop* **Marianne Beate Kielland**

contr **Allan Clayton** *ten* **Neal Davies** *bass*

Bach Collegium Japan / Masaaki Suzuki

BIS © BIS2451 (66' • DDD/DSD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Opera City Concert Hall, Tokyo, January 24, 2019

Beethoven

Symphony No 9, 'Choral', Op 125

Sally Matthews *sop* **Gerhild Romberger** *contr*

Mark Padmore *ten* **Gerald Finley** *bass*

Bavarian Radio Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Bernard Haitink

BR-Klassik © 900180 (72' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie im Gasteig, Munich, February 21-23, 2019

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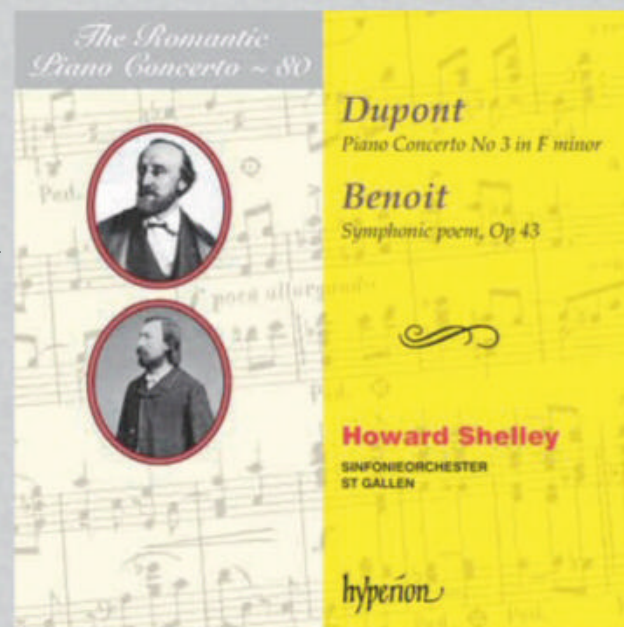
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Little known outside of their native Belgium, both these composers enjoyed great success during their lifetimes.

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Addressing a 'friendly account' of the *Missa solemnis* conducted by Masaaki Suzuki (6/19), Lindsay Kemp found that it left much unsaid: 'the personal intensity of a bigger picture is lacking'. I share these reservations about the Ninth Symphony under Suzuki. The problem is not one of tempos or even scale, but sound world. There need be nothing wrong with violins playing the slow movement's hymn theme to avow a closer allegiance with *Membra Jesu nostri* than with *Götterdämmerung*. Without a patient and inward address to the spirit of *Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung* that the movement shares with the late piano sonatas and quartets, however, it becomes little more than an easy-listening *Andante*.

Some minor fallibilities of intonation (most of them accounted for by the clash of natural horns with even-tempered string tuning) are the only giveaways to the live provenance of the recording, which ends with a full half-minute of 'live' but empty space. This is Suzuki's second recording of the finale, having directed his choir and native soloists 20 years ago in Wagner's piano arrangement of the symphony as played with tremendous verve by Noriko Ogawa (also on BIS).

Time has not brought depth of insight. Even with the limited apparatus at hand, Ogawa invested more tension, more terror and then elation in the Ninth than Suzuki achieves with a full orchestra. Period-band performances commonly achieve a sophisticated balance between and within choral and instrumental textures, but it can't be right for the voices to accompany the orchestra in the 'Freude' fugue. Whether it's the work of Suzuki or his engineers, the entire symphony is lit with a brilliant and unrelenting glare, the acoustic equivalent of a 100-watt bulb.

Small imprecisions (from 0'16" onwards) in the context of a concert performance are one thing, but in Ninths of all sorts from Furtwängler to Antonini they are counterbalanced by an urgency of expression that Bernard Haitink does not come near to drawing from his Bavarian forces on his valedictory recording of the symphony. Neither propelled at Beethoven's intemperate metronome mark nor driven ineluctably forwards by force of conviction, the first movement plots a course as judicious as it

is uneventful towards a Scherzo of similarly disconcerting low voltage, slower and grimmer than Haitink's 2006 LSO Live recording (11/06) but no weightier – and with all repeats observed, one of the longest on record.

Through the course of his six recordings, Haitink has gradually divested the Ninth of Romantic and Wagnerian trappings, and finally arrived at a 13-minute slow movement that flows as smoothly and gently as the waters of Lethe, banishing all memory of past struggles. To return to his underrated first cycle with the LPO (Decca, 1/77 – nla) is to return to an older yet earthier and more present world.

Having crossed the Rubicon of evolving Beethoven traditions, in a reading seemingly conceived to embody Rattle's theory of the Ninth as journeying from Bruckner's Ninth to *Die Zauberflöte*, you might expect Haitink to conduct a springy and uptempo finale in the manner of Suzuki. But no: for all the shaded feminine endings of the BRSO's playing and the cultured blend of its small and professional chorus, this 'Ode to Joy' aspires to grapple with Schiller's text on a grand and ceremonial scale. That it should fall far from doing so is no reflection on a keenly nuanced, Anglo-centric team of soloists but rather on the overall design of an interpretation still in search of a place to call home. **Peter Quantrill**

Ben-Haim • Bloch • Korngold

Ben-Haim Cello Concerto Bloch Baal Shem Suite – Vidui; Nigun. Symphony for Cello and Orchestra Korngold Cello Concerto, Op 37. Die tote Stadt – Tanzlied des Pierrot Raphael Wallfisch *vc* **BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Łukacs Borowicz** CPO © CPO555 273-2 (68' • DDD)



The subtitle of this excellent disc of cello concertos by exiled Jewish composers, 'Voices in the Wilderness' (almost the title of another cello concertante work by Bloch), is curious. Exiles from Nazi Germany, their eventual homes (Israel and the USA) were hardly wildernesses, especially for Ben-Haim, born Paul Frankfurter in Munich, who settled in Palestine – surely the ideal relocation, at least spiritually? For sure, Korngold hankered to return to the Vienna of his youth, but California was hardly a desert.

If you don't know Ben-Haim's music, the Cello Concerto (1962) is an ideal place to

start. A compact, three-movement work, it combines a Levantine atmosphere (especially in the cello-writing, eloquently rendered by Wallfisch) with mid-European technique. Stravinsky is there, too, right from the outset, but Ben-Haim's skill in synthesising these disparate elements – including two Judaeo-Spanish love songs – is brilliant. So too is Bloch's Symphony (1954, the third of his four), originally written for trombone but assigned to the cello as an alternative at publication. I prefer the trombone original but Wallfisch's performance makes a very fine case for his instrument.

Bloch's is less overt a display piece than Korngold's Concerto, composed originally not just for the film *Deception* in 1946 but as part of the plot. Wallfisch definitely has its measure and his account is as compelling as any recent one. Julian Steckel's was well received in these pages, as was Zuill Bailey (ASV, reissued by Alto). A key aspect of all these performances, aside from the passion of Wallfisch's advocacy, is the contribution of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, on splendid form (as ever). The three encores are nicely done, too, but why did they omit the 'Simchas Torah' finale of Bloch's *Baal Shem*? It runs under five minutes and there was bags of room. **Guy Rickards**

Korngold – selected comparisons:

Bailey, Bruckner Orch Linz, Richter

(11/03^R) (ALTO) ALC1390

Steckel, Rhenish St PO, Raiksin

(10/11) (AVT) AVT8553223 or AVT8553501

Birtwistle

Gawain's Journey. Responses, Sweet Disorder^a

^a**Pierre-Laurent Aimard** *pf* **Bavarian Radio**

Symphony Orchestra / Stefan Asbury

Neos © NEOS11729 (56' • DDD/DSD)



Harrison Birtwistle's creativity into his mid-eighties has seen numerous

significant works, not least a second piano concerto. *Responses, Sweet Disorder* (2014) might seem a fanciful title but aptly evokes the interplay between methodical balance and playful anarchy characterising the dialogue between soloist and orchestra; this half-hour piece unfolds in a series of dual contrasts prior to the brief cadenza, then a final pair of contrasts whose manner feels pointedly unclimactic. Pierre-Laurent Aimard sounds fully engaged in what is frequently a concertante part integrated within the texture, while Stefan Asbury (who recorded the revised version of *Antiphonies*, Birtwistle's first

concerto – Metronome, 10/15) presides over a secure premiere.

Garwain's Journey (1991) finds this most unequivocal composer in more combative mood. As devised by Elgar Howarth from Birtwistle's fourth opera, *Garwain*, it stands as both a cohesive paraphrase on that piece and a gripping autonomous work. Much of the discourse is strident, even violent, but several episodes focus on that fraught lyricism which has been a Birtwistle trait from the outset. It is here that Asbury's more considered reading comes into its own next to Howarth's account, with the playing of the Philharmonia marginally less assured than that of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, though the NMC recording's decision to divide this piece into 12 separate tracks according to specific episodes is a definite plus.

The recorded sound has the focus and dynamism this music needs, and Paul Griffiths contributes typically laconic observations. Not for Birtwistle newcomers but a notable addition to his discography.

Richard Whitehouse

Garwain's Journey – comparative version:

Philb Orch, Howarth (7/93^R) (NMC) NMCD088

Brahms • Schumann

Brahms Double Concerto, Op 102^a

Schumann Violin Concerto, WoO1

Antje Weithaas *vn* ^a**Maximilian Hornung** *vc*

NDR Radiophilharmonie / Andrew Manze

CPO © CPO555 172-2 (63' • DDD)



I think it's safe to say that Schumann's Violin Concerto is no longer considered a

drab, sub-par product of the composer's mental decline. It does remain rife with interpretative pitfalls, however – from the knottiness of some of the solo writing to the concentrated character of the orchestral part. Antje Weithaas astutely keeps the elaborate figuration fluid and light (listen, say, to how she dances through the semiquavers at 2'56" in the first movement), although it's her ability to illuminate the music's dark corners (try at 7'57") that makes her performance among the most persuasive on disc. She captures the ruminative, almost obsessive quality of the central *Langsam* with playing that's tenderly delicate yet also utterly unfussy. She even finds a wholly unexpected radiance in the polonaise-like finale, whose ungainly flourishes she dispatches with remarkably easy virtuosity.

There's never been any doubt as to the greatness of Brahms's Double Concerto,

although it, too, is quite a difficult interpretative nut to crack. Here Weithaas is joined by the superb Maximilian Hornung, and the two play with real lyrical urgency. Brahms composed the work for the violinist Joseph Joachim and Robert Hausmann, cellist of Joachim's quartet, and both parts demand a chamber-music-like intimacy as well as the projection of a soloistic personality. Weithaas and Hornung succeed on both counts. Listen at 8'25" in the opening *Allegro* to hear how tightly they interlock, for example, then turn to 2'55" in the *Andante* where Hornung suddenly takes an aggressive stance, providing a dramatic foil for the violinist's gentle entreaties. I'm also impressed by how nimbly both players move through their often thickly written parts. Indeed, this account feels quite elegantly streamlined, in general, yet accomplishes this without undue speed. Julia Fischer and Daniel Müller-Schott (Pentatone, 8/07) are just a hair faster in the final *Vivace non troppo*, for instance, yet feel relatively rushed when heard alongside Weithaas and Hornung.

Andrew Manze elicits playing of remarkable clarity and rhythmic vitality from the NDR Radiophilharmonie – as crucial in the Brahms as it is in the Schumann – and the recorded balance between soloists and orchestra is close to ideal. Indeed, these interpretations are now my top recommendation for both concertos. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Dohnányi

Symphony No 1, Op 9.

Symphonic Minutes, Op 36

Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz /

Roberto Paternostro

Capriccio © C5386 (70' • DDD)



I've asked this before, but is any composer since Haydn better at writing a humorous finale than Ernst von Dohnányi? The finale of his *Symphonic Minutes* is a fizzing little *moto perpetuo* for full orchestra, trimmed, polished and delivered in just under two and a half note-perfect minutes. Under Roberto Paternostro the Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz play it with exuberant panache, and why wouldn't they? Like so many of Dohnányi's smaller-scale works, this is music that takes the sound of an orchestra, bursts it between tongue and palate, and savours the taste. All five movements in this performance are buoyant and zesty.

But Dohnányi's massive five-movement First Symphony is a very different proposition – the young maestro, with roots somewhere between Vienna and Budapest, straining with every creative muscle to take possession of his classical inheritance. The key is a very Brahmsian D minor but in Paternostro's performance – with a solo horn emerging from Wagnerian shadows – it's the spirit of Bruckner that hangs over the opening bars and which characterises the symphony's successively more epic climaxes.

There's a feeling of purposeful – if occasionally ponderous – musical argument, which for me gives it the edge over Matthias Bamert's lush, more detailed but ultimately slightly affectless performance on Chandos. Paternostro delivers steadily mounting Hungarian passion in the swirling, folk-flavoured rhapsody that emerges from the second half of the *Molto adagio*. But his Scherzo is monochrome compared to Leon Botstein and the LPO; likewise Paternostro's viola soloist in the fourth-movement Intermezzo plays it disappointingly straight. Botstein gives the symphony more personality, and more direction overall. But it's a close-run thing, and it's certainly nice to have the choice. **Richard Bratby**

Symphony No 1 – selected comparisons:

LPO, Botstein (2/99) (TELA) CD80511

BBC PO, Bamert (4/99) (CHAN) CHAN9647

Elgar

Elgar Cello Concerto, Op 85^a. Enigma Variations, Op 36 – Nimrod. Romance, Op 62^b Bloch From Jewish Life – No 1, Prayer. Prélude Bridge Spring Song^b Fauré Élégie, Op 24 Klengel Hymnus, Op 57 Traditional Blow the wind southerly. Scarborough Fair

Sheku Kanneh-Mason *vc* and friends

^b**Heath Quartet; ^aLondon Symphony Orchestra / Sir Simon Rattle**

Decca © 485 0241; © ② ④ 485 0333 (69' • DDD)



What is it with Elgar and young musicians? The Violin Concerto found Yehudi

Menuhin and Nigel Kennedy caught in the throes of infatuation, while with Jacqueline du Pré and now Sheku Kanneh-Mason (winner of the 2016 BBC Young Musician competition) it was the Cello Concerto. Kanneh-Mason's recording shines resplendent even against a backdrop of celebrity rivals, much abetted by Simon Rattle's astutely stated LSO accompaniment, where every interlacing detail (especially among the woodwinds)



Elgar brings out the best in Sheku Kanneh-Mason, expertly supported by Sir Simon Rattle and the LSO

is perfectly focused and the surging bass lines soar.

The Concerto's opening immediately commands attention, and when Kanneh-Mason climbs the scale that peaks with Elgar's first big *tutti*, his crying projection truly tugs at the heart-strings. The Scherzo suggests playful badinage, the *Adagio* a private prayer for solace rather than a candid confession (and how beautiful the hushed bars near its close); and when, in the finale, at the *più lento* section, Elgar's meaningfully modulating themes suggest a sequence of unanswerable questions, there's never a hint of overstatement.

Rattle's previous recording with Sol Gabetta and the Berlin Philharmonic (on CD and DVD, the former with Martinů's First Concerto under Krzysztof Urbaniński, the latter with orchestral works including *The Rite of Spring*) is also very fine, as is Gabetta's previous recording under Mario Venzago. When writing about Rattle and Gabetta I noted the conductor's responsiveness, 'the way he moulds phrases, nudges details to the fore, bends the line [and] holds tight to a salient accompanying detail (especially along the lower end of the spectrum)'. I'd add now that his mastery of Elgar's idiom and ear for detail remind me of Adrian Boult at his most persuasive. And while the LSO's leaner tonal

properties are quite different to the gleaming profile of the BPO, Decca's big, closely balanced recording makes for an equally impressive listening experience. As to comparing Kanneh-Mason with Gabetta, I sense marginally greater inwardness on Sheku's part, especially in the first and fourth movements. It really is a remarkable performance, one that has already given me enormous pleasure.

The ensemble makeweights (where Kanneh-Mason serves as a first among equals) are what we in the radio business would call 'fillers', meaning so many pauses for breath between larger works. Sheku has tweeted a video of himself playing Simon Parkin's cello ensemble arrangement of 'Nimrod' and while his appreciation of the 'hunter' as chamber music is obvious, both from what he says and how he plays, I wasn't quite so keen. Something of the music's essential nobility is lost and intimacy is no compensation. On the other hand, Bloch's *Prélude* and 'Prayer' (*From Jewish Life*, arranged by Sheku himself) relate a genuine sense of cantorial intensity and the programme's unaccompanied prelude, 'Blow the wind southerly' (again arranged by Sheku), is touching in its warmth and simplicity. Other pieces arranged for ensemble are by Elgar, Bridge, Klengel and Fauré, as

well as 'Scarborough Fair'. Crusty old curmudgeon that I am, I'd far rather have had the Walton or Finzi Concertos than any of it (Gabetta and Venzago also couple the Concerto with a sequence of mostly miniatures), but there's little doubt that in terms of the Elgar Concerto, the digitally recorded ranks are significantly enriched: as well as Gabetta, such fine cellists as Natalie Clein (EMI, A/07), Alisa Weilerstein (Decca, 2/13) and Steven Isserlis (Hyperion, 3/16) now have a credible additional rival. **Rob Cowan**

Elgar Cello Concerto – selected comparisons:

Gabetta, Danish Nat SO, Venzago

(10/10) (RCA) 88697 65824-2

Gabetta, BPO, Rattle (2/17) (SONY) 88985 35079-2

Gabetta, BPO, Rattle (2/17) (EURO)

DVD 205 9968; Blu-ray 205 9964

Finger

'Music for European Courts and Concerts'
Alexander the Great - Morpheus, gentle god.
Chaconnes - a 4 in G; a 5 in G. Concerto a 6 in F.
Fantasia in G minor. The Loves of Mars and Venus - Come all, with moving songs prepare.
The Mourning Bride - Overture; Air; Gavotte; Air.
Sonatas - a 5 in B flat; a 6 in C; a 6 in D; a 9 in G minor; a tre chori in C

The Harmonious Society of Tickle-Fiddle Gentlemen / Robert Rawson

Ramée © RAM1802 (67' • DDD)

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...**Miguel Harth-Bedoya*

The Peruvian Chief Conductor of the Norwegian Radio Orchestra discusses the music of the Ginastera, having recorded the Harp Concerto and Variaciones concertantes

What first drew you to Ginastera's music?

Ginastera is one of the classical composers with music of the highest quality. Not necessarily in the way the Europeans might describe 'classical', but he is the first established composer from South America who influenced those South American composers who came after him. The fact that I am Peruvian does not mean that I automatically knew Ginastera well; I spent years studying the various facets of his work.

The Harp Concerto is more usually recorded with similar concertos by other composers, so it's good to have more Ginastera as the coupling - what attracted you to the Variaciones concertantes?

We recently celebrated the centenary of Ginastera's birth (1916), and that anniversary seemed a good reason to celebrate his music in an all-Ginastera recording. *Variaciones concertantes* is a concerto for orchestra, and is one of many pieces that suit the players of the Norwegian Radio Orchestra perfectly.

The orchestra certainly provides some wonderful solo playing on this album. You've been their Chief Conductor for some years now - how do you find working with these musicians?

Working with the Norwegian Radio Orchestra is exhilarating and inspiring. The players motivate me to be better for them. One way that we have grown together is by finding new and challenging repertoire. It is a dynamic orchestra - neither too big nor too small - allowing a variety of repertoire including exciting projects such as this one.

What can we look forward to next?

We have two recordings that should be released later this year, one of symphonic music from around the world (Canada, Egypt, New Zealand, Uruguay, South Africa, Singapore, Slovakia, Kazakhstan and Chile), and one of Latin American



classics. All the works on both discs will be world premiere recordings. We have already released two previous recordings of South American music featuring living composers, so this forthcoming album focuses on South American masters of the past (including the 20th century).



It's been a good year for Gottfried Finger, the Moravian-born composer who

moved to London in the 1680s and made a respected name for himself working alongside Purcell, Blow and the rest in the theatre, court and concert room. Earlier Duo Dorado gave us first recordings of a worthy clutch of violin sonatas (Chandos, 9/19), and now here is a disc entirely made of (principally instrumental) 'premieres' from across the range of his output. That makes it a better overall introduction to Finger, I guess, especially as the repertoire covers his activities in the three decades after he left England in 1701, a significant chunk of his career that included employment at the courts of the Queen of Prussia in Berlin and the Elector Palatine in Breslau, Innsbruck, Neuberg, Heidelberg and finally Mannheim.

Finger's music has an eclectic feel, then, reflecting his enthusiasm for Italian music,

his upbringing as a pupil of Biber, the lively scene that was Restoration London and the instrumental colours opened up to him by the wind players (including hornists) of the German courts. One of the joys of listening to his music is hearing how he allows these influences to jostle within the same piece, as for instance in the Sonata a 6 in C which, with its trumpets and drums, begins like one of Biber's grandiose Salzburg pieces but transitions via a Purcellian 'drag' to a violin-led finale. This is far from being the only example of this kind of stylistic shape-shifting, and if some movements ramble a little bit, the way the music keeps you guessing (for instance in the scatter-brained Fantasia) is part of the fun.

Robert Rawson and The Harmonious Society of Tickle-Fiddle Gentlemen (who better to play Finger?) are to be congratulated for searching out and organising this rare music and for presenting it in such an attractive way. The performances are enthusiastic and assured, with the wind players distinguishing themselves especially, though I think the recording could have given them more

focus. With its fresh and varied programme, however, this disc is still a pleasure to sample. **Lindsay Kemp**

Ginastera

Harp Concerto, Op 25^a.

Variaciones concertantes, Op 23

^aSidsel Walstad *hp* Norwegian Radio

Orchestra / Miguel Harth-Bedoya

LAWO © LWC1182 (49' • DDD)



There aren't very many concertos for harpists to choose from - and even fewer

of truly high quality - which likely explains why Ginastera's superbly crafted work has proved relatively popular on disc, with nearly a dozen versions since its premiere recording by Nicanor Zabaleta (DG, 1/71). Sidsel Walstad takes a very individual approach to this concerto, playing with a delicately fine, ethereal tone that is unexpected in such earthy music. She's wholly convincing, however, providing a

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Photo: Todd Rosenberg



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gently glittering foil to the bristling orchestral part. Her playing of the long cadenza (at the beginning of track 3) is magical in its subtle shading, and I like that she takes her time, allowing the silences to speak as loudly as the notes themselves. The Norwegian Radio Orchestra (of which she is a member) provide solid support under Miguel Harth-Bedoya, and I only wish the engineers had given them greater presence. The balance allows the harp to be heard clearly throughout but lacks the satisfying sonic punch of the equally clear ASV recording with Nancy Allen (8/89).

I'm glad to see that the composer's *Variaciones concertantes* is finally catching up to the Harp Concerto in popularity, for it's just as well wrought and perhaps even more musically endearing. Harth-Bedoya emphasises the concerto-for-orchestra nature of the score, eliciting playing that's notable for its clarity and precision. Juanjo Mena has more fun with it on his recent Chandos recording (9/18) but there's some terrific solo playing here by the Norwegian musicians, and it's a pity that none are listed in the booklet. The orchestra's brass and woodwinds are especially impressive – listen, for example, to their rich tone in the 'Interludio per fiati' (track 13). And in this work, thankfully, the engineers put the NRO right in our faces. Warmly recommended. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Hancock

Raptures. Variations on a Heroic Theme.

Violin Concerto^a

^a**Jack Liebeck** *vn*

BBC Concert Orchestra / Levon Parikian

Orchid © ORC10111 (60' • DDD)



With his stylistic roots in the scores of John Williams and Elmer Bernstein it seems

hardly surprising that Stuart Hancock (b1975) should have made his name through film and television over the past quarter of a century, but this release features three of his concert works. Despite its proclamatory opening and ecstatic climax, the lengthy first movement of his Violin Concerto (2007) is predominantly understated to allow the soloist to indulge its more lyrical side – not least in a ruminative cadenza. The central *Andante* finds the violin duetting with various woodwind on the way to a rapturous culmination, then the final *Allegro* provides a welcome injection of energy which Jack Liebeck savours right through to the effervescent closing bars.

As to the other pieces, *Variations on a Heroic Theme* (2007) is a breezy curtain-raiser which ought to go down a storm if scheduled by Classic FM, with *Raptures* (2003) audibly within the lineage of the descriptive suites by Ferde Grofé and Morton Gould – albeit more in the resourcefulness of its orchestration than the durability of its themes. It certainly provides an apt showcase for the BBC Concert Orchestra, sounding at or near its best under the assured direction of Levon Parikian. Spacious sound and detailed annotations also leave little to be desired, and those responsive to Hancock's soundtrack albums will find much to enjoy here. **Richard Whitehouse**

Ives

Symphonies – No 3, 'The Camp Meeting'^a; No 4^b.

Selected American Hymns^c

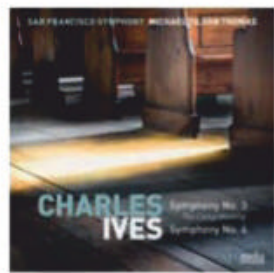
San Francisco Symphony ^{bc}**Chorus and**

^{ab}**Orchestra / Michael Tilson Thomas**

SFS Media © 21936 0076-2 (69' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at Davies Symphony Hall, San

Francisco, November ^{ac}10-12 & ^{bc}16-18, 2017



'Gloriously gut-punching' was a San Francisco critic's verdict on the live

performance of Ives's Fourth Symphony used for this disc. He was of course referring primarily to the riotous second movement, *Comedy: Allegretto*, which is both extravagantly elaborate and tremendously exhilarating. Only those alienated by its gleeful forcefulness could possibly hear it as chaotic, and this performance gains greatly from Michael Tilson Thomas's clear-headed control over every expressive aspect of the work: not just the razzamatazz but the almost comic sobriety of the fugal third movement and, most tellingly of all, the high-minded eloquence of the finale as it slowly dissolves into silence. This is an exceptionally well-crafted reading of a notoriously complex score, and exceptionally well recorded, with the welter of competing instrumental lines – even a theremin can be heard at one point – always given sufficient space to make their contributions register. Peter Dugan gives the boldly delineated solo piano part maximum weight and the brief choral contributions are raptly evocative.

Ives himself thought particularly highly of the visionary finale, and the whole work tends to blow away anything and everything it gets paired with – even the Third Symphony. It does so again on this disc; the most recent coupling before

this one, from the Seattle Symphony under Ludovic Morlot (4/16), included a fine version of the Fourth that left the relatively sober Third seeming almost lame: few conductors since Bernstein have been able to puzzle out its special emotional temperature. Tilson Thomas shapes the long, effusive lines effectively in a recording that gives a natural perspective to richly sonorous textures. But even he can't completely banish a feeling that the music teeters on the verge of aimlessness here and there. With no sudden outbursts of brass band mayhem, an aura of straitlaced piety can become all too real.

You can't accuse the San Francisco Symphony Chorus of being overly genteel in the short groups of hymns that precede each of the symphonies. But it's difficult to imagine anything less authentically Ivesian than these polished, professionally sung renditions, with their discreet organ accompaniments. Maybe some recordings of actual church congregations, with a mix of singing on and off the note, as well as the odd wrong note from the organist, might have been better. Nevertheless, if you skip the hymns and just take in the two symphonies, the full gamut of Ives's uncompromisingly innovative exploration of how a wide range of popular and functional musics, not just hymns, could bring a distinctively new, experimental character to mainstream orchestral genres is as satisfying as ever. **Arnold Whittall**

Mozart

'Youth Symphonies'

Symphonies – No 1, K16; No 4, K19; K19a/Anh223; No 5, K22; No 7a, 'Alte Lambach', K45a/Anh221.

Five Contredanses, K609

Freiburg Baroque Orchestra /

Gottfried von der Goltz *vn*

Aparté © AP215 (65' • DDD)



The catalogue numbers may suggest otherwise, but this disc gathers

the four earliest known symphonies by the young Mozart, along with one from a little later. The 19th-century complete edition of his works, compiled by Breitkopf & Härtel, numbered the symphonies up to No 41 but subsequent scholarly wrangling has discounted some and discovered others – which is, for example, the reason we often hear Symphonies Nos 36 and 38 but never No 37, which turns out to be by Michael Haydn, with only the slow introduction a later addition by Mozart.

Thus Symphony No 1, K16, is commonly accepted as Mozart's First Symphony, although there are reasons to suggest that there was a still earlier work, now lost. (No 2, K17, is now attributed more firmly to Mozart *père* while No 3, K18, is a copy by the boy of a symphony by CF Abel.) No 4, K19, was written shortly after K16 in London, with K19*a* following a few months later in Holland; its owes its lack of a B&H number to the fact that the complete score was only discovered as recently as the 1980s. No 5, K22, comes from The Hague at the end of 1765 and the *Alte Lambach* from the following year.

They come around on disc fairly regularly – more so than comparable works by Haydn – but rarely played with such élan as here. The Freiburgers make the now classic period-instrument set by the Academy of Ancient Music (L'Oiseau-Lyre) sound pale in comparison: a testament to the advances over the past three or four decades in the marshalling of recalcitrant 'ancient' instruments.

When treated with such seriousness of intent, these works reveal the astonishing speed with which Mozart, even before his 10th birthday, was able to absorb prevailing trends and write with style, taste and an unerring ear for effect: some of the slow movements, especially, display a depth and sensitivity that eluded composers four or five times his age in the 1760s. Horns and oboes give colour and contour to the music, while a continuo harpsichord is fairly prominent. The symphonies are punctuated with five contredanses Mozart composed for noble entertainments at the other end of his short life – a juxtaposition that seems surprisingly natural. The only criticism to be made is that the statue depicted in the cover art is a Ukrainian example rather than the one in Orange Square in Chelsea, just a short walk away from the house in Ebury Street where Mozart composed his first symphonies.

David Threasher

Mussorgsky • Khachaturian • Shchedrin

Kabalevsky Colas Breugnon – Overture

Khachaturian Spartacus – Suite **Mussorgsky** Pictures at an Exhibition (orch Ravel)

Rachmaninov How fair this spot, Op 21 No 7 (arr T Jackson) **Shchedrin** Concerto for Orchestra No 1, 'Naughty Limericks'

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko

Onyx © ONYX4211 (74' • DDD)



This is one of those discs that commands respect (this conductor is pretty much always a safe investment) without setting the world on fire. I kept waiting for, anticipating, moments in all of these pieces when Petrenko would slip into his top gear and raise the stakes, ratchet up the excitement. Instead, here he is home from home with a series of glossy postcards from the Motherland and very much in cruise mode.

Kabalevsky's *Colas Breugnon* Overture – Russia's answer to Bernstein's *Candide* Overture – zips by, its cheeky syncopated kick-back in the rhythm and rather more 'serious' big tune efficiently playing off each other, but leaving us wondering, perhaps, if pushing the basic tempo and screwing the tension just a tad more might have made all the difference. That is very much the feeling I take away from this truncated suite from the Bolshoi's muscular and perennially popular epic *Spartacus*. The big *Adagio* for hero and heroine now has nautical associations, of course (*The Onedin Line* made Khachaturian what he always wanted to be, an international superstar), but that's not to detract from the splendour of the tune even if the big ground-swelling climax is here less thrilling for the reticence of the trumpets.

Perhaps that is in part due to the sound picture, which certainly honours the open acoustic of Liverpool's handsome Philharmonic Hall but lacks the 'immediacy' I personally welcome in music like this. Khachaturian's most brashly scored numbers – like the close of the 'Variation of Aegina and Bacchanalia' and the triumphal finale – tend to swim in this acoustic and one misses the keenness, the clarity, the impact of brass and percussion, not least trumpets again in the rowdy peroration of 'Victory of Spartacus'.

Things sound sharper with the tighter ensemble and jazz combo feel of Shchedrin's audacious Concerto for Orchestra No 1, *Naughty Limericks*. The inspiration may lie with folk tunes but the effect is most definitely 'looney tunes'. It's kind of *Till Eulenspiegel* on heat and Petrenko totally 'gets' the irony of its prankster nature. Probably the best thing on the disc.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Petrenko's account of the Mussorgsky/Ravel *Pictures* is that it feels mindful of the piano original in the way that it is inflected and shaped. Picture for picture it's hard to

fault playing or characterisation on a leisurely stroll round the gallery – but then again, do any of these aural images really leap out at you? Yes and no. The big panoply of bells at the close of 'The Great Gate of Kiev' perhaps – suddenly overwhelming – but like 'Bydło', the ox-cart, it's a performance that clings sturdily to the middle of the road.

Lovely idea to conclude with Timothy Jackson's orchestral transcription of the wistful Rachmaninov song 'Zdes' khorosho'. Plainly it makes Petrenko's heart sing. **Edward Seckerson**

A Norman

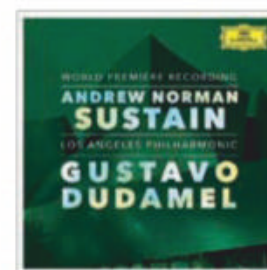
Sustain

Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra /

Gustavo Dudamel

DG © 483 7608 (33' • DDD)

Recorded live at Walt Disney Hall, Los Angeles, October 2018



Andrew Norman burst upon the scene a few years ago with the three-movement,

45-minute-long symphony *Play* (2013, rev 2016), which earned the now 40-year-old composer the coveted Grawemeyer Award in 2017. I've only heard *Play* on the Boston Modern Orchestra Project's superb recording under Gil Rose (see the *Gramophone* feature, 11/16), and Norman says the work is designed to be experienced live. I'll buy that. On disc, at least, I find the work dazzling in its orchestral legerdemain, structural command and sheer ingenuity, but also exhausting. *Sustain* (2018) is something else entirely, however, and in all honesty I can't listen to it without feeling a welling up of profound emotion.

Composed for the centenary of the LA Philharmonic, Norman says that *Sustain* deals with both time (specifically how our interaction with music might change in the next 100 years) and the natural world. 'And if there is a sense of sadness or loss that permeates this music, it comes from the knowledge that we, at this critical moment in our history, are not doing enough to sustain the planet that sustains us.'

The work is cast in the form of a 'contracting spiral' in which the initial 17 minutes of music is repeated 10 times at increasingly faster tempos so that the final iteration is mere seconds long. It begins with a brief, billowing gesture from two pianos tuned a quarter-tone apart (this becomes a signal for the beginning of each

subsequent repetition), then the strings begin a slow, vaporous descent. There are hints of aching melody (listen at 6'30") and some wondrous orchestral effects – in some, Norman seems to glance back to Ligeti's *Atmosphères* while in others he stakes out entirely new territory (note, for instance, how he makes the orchestra sound almost electronic starting around 10'30").

As *Sustain* swirls inexorably towards its ultimate destruction, it exerts a gravitational pull that has the dramatic certitude of a Greek tragedy. I don't want to spoil the ending for you; even if it doesn't dispel the intense feeling of loss, it's magical nonetheless. The performance is utterly gorgeous as well as gripping, and stunningly captures the clear acoustic of Disney Hall. Fervently recommended.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Prokofiev

Alexander Nevsky, Op 78^a

Lieutenant Kijé Suite, Op 60

^aAlisa Kolosova *mez* ^aUniversity of Utah

A Cappella Choir and Chamber Choir;
Utah Symphony ^aChorus and Orchestra /
Thierry Fischer

Reference Recordings (R) (FR735SACD
(60' • DDD/DSD • t)

Recorded live at Maurice Abravanel Hall,
Salt Lake City, November 18 & 19, 2016



Thierry Fischer
pairs two contrasting
Prokofiev film scores
in this Utah

Symphony release: the gritty, rarely heard cantata *Alexander Nevsky* and the quirky, satirical *Lieutenant Kijé*. The latter is best known for its 'Troika', which briefly bursts in on Greg Lake's 1975 best-seller, 'I believe in Father Christmas', and is guaranteed to raise a smile.

The score Prokofiev composed for Sergey Eisenstein's 1938 film depicting the 13th-century power struggle in Russia should bristle with tension. But *Nevsky* is given a sober reading here, the University of Utah A Cappella Choir and University of Utah Chamber Choir on their best behaviour in the 'Song of Alexander Nevsky' and 'The Crusade in Pskov'. Turn to the Mariinsky Chorus, whipped up by Valery Gergiev, and you experience something much more visceral. Alisa Kolosova sings mournfully in 'The Field of the Dead' but without the plush mezzo tone of Olga Borodina on Philips. 'The Battle on the Ice' builds to a grand climax but there's often a sense of 'safety first', whereas Gergiev just cuts loose – overall,

his Mariinsky recording romps in six minutes faster than Fischer's. Claudio Abbado is faster too, although the LSO playing is more polished than its St Petersburg counterparts.

From its plaintive opening trumpet call, the playing of the Utah Symphony is much more sprightly in a fine account of the *Lieutenant Kijé* Suite. Fischer draws out Prokofiev's puckish humour well, high woodwinds in jocular mood. There's a jaunty step to 'Kijé's Wedding' and the 'Troika' clips along at a good pace. Claudio Abbado's LSO recording is still the prime reference, especially in bright DG sound.

Reference Recordings usually come excellently engineered; I recall a couple of superb 'Prof Johnson' discs of Respighi (with the Minnesota Orchestra) and Britten (with the Kansas City Symphony). This disc, however, has a disappointingly dull, occasionally restricted sound palette. I note it was recorded at concert performances in the Maurice Abravanel Hall. **Mark Pullinger**

Nevsky, Kijé – selected comparison:

LSO, Abbado (4/80^R, 6/95) (DG) 447 419-2GOR

Nevsky – selected comparison:

Mariinsky Orch, Gergiev (6/03) (PHIL) ➔ 473 600-2PH

Ravel

'Jeux de miroirs'

Miroirs – *Alborada del gracioso* (solo piano^a and orchestral^b versions). *Le tombeau de Couperin* (solo piano^a and orchestral^b versions). Piano Concerto in G^c

^{ac}Javier Perianes *pf*

^{bc}Orchestre de Paris / Josep Pons

Harmonia Mundi (H) HMM90 2236 (81' • DDD)



Fine though it is,
this disc suffers,
perhaps, from being
too self-consciously
programmed. Using what is effectively a

palindromic structure, Javier Perianes and Josep Pons flank Ravel's G major Piano Concerto with the piano and orchestral versions of *Le tombeau de Couperin* and *Alborada del gracioso*, the underlying idea being that the latter relate to one another 'as if in a mirror', while the concerto 'combines the two facets, both when the piano is integrated into the overall sound and when it plays its role as a soloist'.

The resulting contrasts are certainly instructive. *Tombeau* commemorates not only French Baroque music but also friends lost in action in the First World War, and one immediately notices the greater harmonic pungency of the piano version, while the orchestral score, minus the formality of the original's Fugue and

Toccata, conveys a deeper, more immediate vein of sadness. The orchestral *Alborada*, meanwhile, possesses, inevitably perhaps, a greater sensuality than the piano equivalent, where the underlying grotesquerie is very much to the fore. Yet at the same time, we're also perilously close here to what feels like an academic exercise in comparison, and hearing the two versions of *Tombeau* in such close proximity, in particular, involves levels of repetition that curiously weaken the impact of both.

This is no reflection on the performances, which are unquestionably strong. Perianes's *Alborada* has terrific panache, bags of tone colour and an understated virtuosity that proves immensely persuasive, while his *Tombeau* has all the refinement and subtlety you could wish for: the filigree grace of the Fugue and the drive and wit of the closing Toccata are particularly beguiling. The Orchestre de Paris, similarly, are on superb form for Pons with some lovely woodwind counterpoint in the *Tombeau* Prélude and a really beautiful sheen on the strings in *Alborada*, where Pons lingers, one notices, over the slower central section, in contrast to Perianes, who pushes urgently through it.

Care as well as virtuosity inform the performance of the Concerto, meanwhile, where rhythms are crisp and precise, the outer movements have plenty of élan and brilliance, and the bittersweet mood of the *Adagio assai* is beautifully captured, leading to a real surge of emotion at the climax. The Hispanic flourishes that lurk beneath the first movement's second subject are deftly emphasised, and the orchestral playing has an appealing dexterity throughout. As a totality, however, the programme works better if you reverse the running order, opening with the piano *Alborada* and closing with its orchestral counterpart, rather than the other way round. Ultimately, though, the sum of its parts don't quite add up to a satisfactory whole, and it's best to listen selectively.

Tim Ashley

Röntgen

Piano Concertos – No 3; No 6; No 7

Oliver Triendl *pf* Kristiansand Symphony

Orchestra / Hermann Bäumer

CPO (C) CPO555 055-2 (70' • DDD)



The German-born Dutch composer Julius Röntgen was nothing if not prolific. In



Refinement and subtlety: the conductor Josep Pons and pianist Javier Perianes perform Ravel with colour and panache

addition to some 25 symphonies and three concertos each for violin and cello, there are seven piano concertos, all written for the composer's own use. Oliver Triendl has recorded three of them with the Kristiansand SO under Hermann Bäumer: the Third Concerto, completed in 1888, and the Sixth and Seventh, composed simultaneously between 1929 and 1930, two years before Röntgen's death.

The Third Concerto in D minor, its four movements unfolding during the course of 34 minutes, employs many of the 'heroic medieval' tropes we associate with the Brahms Ballades. Most compelling is its slow movement, a lovely Romance. Triendl brings a great deal of sympathy and skill to the score. Yet one is left wondering how a composer who so assiduously cultivated the piano concerto made do with what seems to have been a rather limited pianistic arsenal.

Stylistically speaking, the Third Concerto sounds of its time, the decade that produced the second concertos of Tchaikovsky and Brahms, the MacDowell concertos and the *Symphonic Variations* of Franck. By the time of Röntgen's final two concertos, however, Prokofiev had written his first three, Bartók his first and Gershwin his *Rhapsody in Blue*. Not surprisingly, these works of the 75-year-

old composer, still rooted in late Romanticism in essence if not detail, sound rather sadly anachronistic. Röntgen premiered them in Edinburgh under the baton of his supporter, Donald Francis Tovey, who had arranged for his Dutch friend to receive an honorary doctorate at the University. In the single-movement E minor Sixth Concerto and the three-movement Seventh in C major, both of which last about 18 minutes, Röntgen seems to have had a falling-off of inspiration, if not of craft. Triendl, Bäumer and the Kristiansand musicians clearly give both works their best but it may be that, at least for the time being, the scores are beyond resuscitation. **Patrick Rucker**

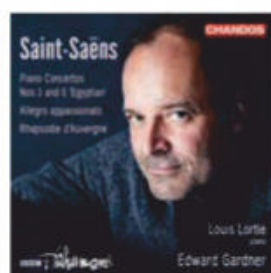
Saint-Saëns

Piano Concertos – No 3, Op 29; No 5, 'Egyptian', Op 103. Allegro appassionato, Op 43. Rhapsodie d'Auvergne, Op 73

Louis Lortie *pf*

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Edward Gardner

Chandos © CHAN20038 (67' • DDD)



Saint-Saëns's piano concertos have been well served on disc in recent years, not least

by Bertrand Chamayou's double *Gramophone* Award last year for Best Concerto and Recording of the Year, and by Alexandre Kantorow's traversal of concertos Nos 3, 4 and 5 on a single disc. The present disc is the second volume of Saint-Saëns's works for piano and orchestra, to the first of which (with Concertos Nos 1, 2 and 4) I gave a guarded welcome in October 2018. Re-reading my comments, I cannot but repeat the same merits and reservations.

Lortie is a wonderfully gifted artist, able to generate live performance electricity in the studio, aided and abetted by a conductor who brings a muscular energy to proceedings – and who relishes the details of Saint-Saëns's orchestration, frequently a little too much. Tempos in the two concertos are on the fast side, nearer to Stephen Hough than to Jean-Marie Darré, Chamayou and Kantorow, who all take slightly broader views. There is no getting away from the fact that Lortie can be tremendously exciting with his thunderous octaves and swashbuckling engagement with the orchestra, but it's all a bit in-your-face and relentless. You feel that he has been compelled to compete with Gardner's enthusiastic accompaniment in which secondary material (woodwind riffs in the Third Concerto, for example, string motifs

in the first movement of the Fifth) are allowed to take precedence over the piano's primary role. And just listen to the beginning of the last movement of the *Egyptian*, where the basic pulse is too lightly defined, and to the final page, where Lortie and his piano, on the verge of triumph, are cruelly stamped underfoot by Gardner and his band.

This is not a poor recording by any means, but for me it lacks refinement and that essential Gallic light touch and tone which are heard to more advantage in the other recordings mentioned. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Piano Concertos – selected comparisons:

Hough, CBSO, Oramo (11/01) (HYPE) CDA67331/2

A Kantorow, Tapiola Sinfonietta, J.-J. Kantorow

(6/19) (BIS) BIS2300

Piano Concerto No 5 – selected comparison:

Chamayou, French Nat Orch, Krivine

(10/18) (ERAT) 9029 56342-6

Šerkšnytė

De profundis^a. Midsummer Song^a.

Songs of Sunset and Dawn^b

^bLina Dambrauskaitė sop ^bJustina Gringytė mez

^bTomas Pavilionis ten ^bNerijus Masevičius bass-bar

^bVilnius Municipal Choir Jauna Muzika;

^aKremerata Baltica / Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla;

^bLithuanian National Symphony Orchestra /

Giedrė Šlekytė

DG (CD + DVD) 483 7761GH2

(56' + 54' • DDD • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo • O)

DVD: 'Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla: Going

for the Impossible – A Portrait'



Lithuanian new music is coming into its own, an impressive release of Žibuoklė

Martinaitytė (5/19) now followed by one of Raminta Šerkšnytė (b1975), who attracted wider attention with *Fires*, championed by the late Mariss Jansons (BR-Klassik, 12/13), and *De profundis* (1998) for Kremerata Baltica. Compared to its previous version, Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla favours a more spacious and less visceral yet comparably intense approach – audibly relishing this music's acute contrasts as its earlier anguish becomes progressively diffused towards a sombre and questioning close.

Here it forms a combative centrepiece between *Midsummer Song* (2008) and *Songs of Sunset and Dawn* (2007). The former is a contemplation of the summer solstice in fastidious textures and elliptical harmonies that between them outline a vision more bewitching for its elusiveness. The latter is a 'cantata-oratorio' with texts by Rabindranath Tagore – a poet most

notably set by Zemlinsky, although the emotional volatility of his *Lyric Symphony* is worlds away from Šerkšnytė's piece and its purposeful course from the diaphanous calm of 'Day. Evening', through the fugitive activity of 'Night', then on to the surging radiance of 'Morning. Eternal Morning'. For all their soaring lyricism, the four soloists most often function as semi-chorus to the actual choir as this merges into the orchestra for what becomes an indivisible whole.

The work is persuasively conducted by Giedrė Šlekytė, but it is Gražinytė-Tyla's international emergence that forms the subject of a filmed 'portrait' by Daniela Schmidt-Langels. Footage of her directing Tchaikovsky and Debussy in Birmingham and Berlin, or Lithuanian music in Salzburg, is intercut with recollections of her formative years when Lithuania forged its new identity during the post-Soviet era. Most striking is her traversal of the remote Curonian Spit, whose Arcadian landscape provides a striking corollary to Šerkšnytė's equally alluring music. **Richard Whitehouse**

De profundis – comparative version:

Kremerata Baltica, Kremer (11/10) (NONE) 7559 79969-9

Shostakovich

Symphony No 10, Op 93

Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Mariss Jansons

BR-Klassik (CD) 900185 (54' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Herkulesaal, Munich,

March 4, 2010



What you might call the Mahlerisation of Shostakovich

continues its grim march onwards. Forty and fifty years ago, it was enough for conductors to keep a piece like the Scherzo of the Tenth together and on the move and for orchestras to play the guts out of it. 'A portrait of Stalin' – as relayed by Solomon Volkov – was all we thought we needed to know by way of context. Now the portrait must be fleshed out, flecked with detail, loaded up with Austro-German symphonic baggage. Perhaps modern maestros have ruefully acknowledged that they won't out-Mravinsky Mravinsky (Warner, 6/92). Or time (the passing thereof, but also the temper of our own) has robbed interpreters as well as listeners of a living connection to music that once spoke plainly to listeners far beyond its place of origin.

At any rate, while Beethoven performances have become ever more tightly lashed to the metronome, it is

peculiar to find Shostakovich subjected to the kind of false equation of slow and massive equals profound equals desirable for which mid-century recordings of Classical-era repertoire are commonly deplored. It is difficult to imagine anyone happy with one of the late Mariss Jansons's previous recordings (from Philadelphia, 6/95, and Amsterdam, 8/13) feeling compelled to update their collection, or any listener previously unpersuaded by the conductor's pursuit of beauty above all suddenly experiencing a road-to-Damascus moment where the Tenth Symphony is concerned.

Unlike Zhdanov's cultural policy for the Central Committee, *Gramophone* pushes no party line, but previous verdicts of 'sterile ... spiritually disengaged' and 'too urbane' hold for the newcomer from Munich. Marginally slower in each movement and more fallible – a tiny smear in the third chord of the Scherzo is one instance, a momentary loss of coordination at 6'15" into the finale is another – it brings the compensations of a three-dimensional sound stage and a deep-pile string section.

Or are they drawbacks? The Philadelphia recording made by EMI engineers now feels authentically dry, taut and urgent by comparison. In Munich, Jansons moulds the slow introduction to the finale with an ever more refined touch, and a weight and density to rival Karajan's Berliners. Even returning to Karajan's digital-era remake (DG, 8/90), however, is like turning up an old family photo album; the portamento, the rough intensity, the creeping menace of the *Allegro* belong almost to another age. Almost alone among 21st-century Tenth, the RLPO and Vasily Petrenko (Naxos, 9/16) roll back the years. **Peter Quantrill**

Tchaikovsky

The Nutcracker, Op 71

Sveshnikov Boys Choir of the Moscow Choral

School; State Academic Symphony Orchestra of

Russia 'Evgeny Svetlanov' / Vladimir Jurowski

Pentatone (CD) PTC5186 761 (86' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Moscow Tchaikovsky

Conservatory, January 2019



Santa's sleigh may have delivered this disc a fraction too late for our December issue,

but then *The Nutcracker* isn't just for Christmas. Indeed, this fine performance was captured in concert at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory last January, just after the Russian Orthodox Christmas. It completes Vladimir Jurowski's survey of

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Tchaikovsky's ballets with the 'Svetlanov' Orchestra, which he serves as artistic director. It doesn't hold quite the same drama as his *Swan Lake* (11/18) and *Sleeping Beauty* (ICA Classics, 12/17) accounts but is – some authentic Russian brass wobble apart – a refined reading, as highly polished as a Fabergé egg.

The State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia 'Evgeny Svetlanov' sounds far better disciplined than its older, more brazen days as the USSR State Symphony. There are times when I'd have welcomed a little more misbehaviour, but Jurowski is a strict master. Everything is neat as a pin in the dainty Overture and the March clips along tidily. The boys ambush girls playing with their dolls with nice impudence, though, and the battle with the Mouse King has a suitably toytown feel. The divertissement numbers of Act 2 are lightly whipped, if not exactly bursting with character, apart from some grumbling bassoons in the Chinese Dance. Jurowski then comes to life in a Waltz of the Flowers that sweeps you off your feet (even faster than Gergiev!), while the opening of the great *pas de deux* for the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier has tremendous ardour and forward momentum. And it's good to see Vera Almazova, the celesta player, getting a credit for her twinkly Sugar Plum Fairy pirouettes and Nina Kupriyanova for her graceful harp cadenza that launches the Waltz of the Flowers.

Comparing this new recording with others emanating from Russia in the past two decades has been instructive. Valery Gergiev is the most theatrical of the bunch, particularly in his first recording – when the Mariinsky was still trading under its Soviet Kirov title – which bustles along thrillingly in just 81 minutes (my top choice in my December 2017 Collection). Gergiev is a man of the theatre and it shows in his handling of the score's big moments in Act 1, the magical transformation of the Christmas tree and the pine forest in winter. Former Bolshoi music director Alexander Vedernikov (now at St Petersburg's Mikhailovsky Theatre) is often quite dull in comparison, although the Bolshoi brass can be both bracing and bruising – you can understand why Pentatone wanted a new *Nutcracker* in its catalogue. Jurowski is closer in spirit and refinement to Mikhail Pletnev, whose Russian National Orchestra may be on best behaviour in the two big waltzes but elsewhere exude joy. Gergiev would still be my top choice; but those who've enjoyed Jurowski's *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty* will want this new recording.

Perhaps Jurowski can be persuaded to set down the score to John Cranko's ballet version of *Onegin* too? **Mark Pullinger**

Selected comparisons:

Kirov Orch, Gergiev (1/99) (PHIL) 462 114-2PH

Russian Nat Orch, Pletnev (1/12) (ONDI) ODE1180-2D

Mariinsky Orch, Gergiev (12/16) (MARI) MAR0593

Bolshoi Tb Orch, Vedernikov (PENT) PTC5186 091

'Dreamtime'

Busoni Divertimento, Op 52 K285 Mozart

Andante, K315 Penderecki Flute Concerto

Reinecke Flute Concerto, Op 283. Ballade,

Op 288 Takemitsu I hear the water dreaming

Emmanuel Pahud fl

Munich Radio Orchestra / Ivan Repušić

Warner Classics © 9029 53924-4 (79' • DDD)



This album's title, 'Dreamtime', suggests a programme of quiet listening – a slew of soothing *adagios*, perhaps – but it's actually nothing of the sort. In a booklet note, Emmanuel Pahud writes that, rather than 'stylistic or chronological consistency', he wanted instead to illustrate 'the power of dreams and the unreal, as well as the strength of the composers' personal Romantic visions'. In other words, he's casting an extremely wide net.

Whether Mozart had a 'Romantic vision' for his *Andante* is debatable but Pahud's sweetly expressive and quite leisurely reading is certainly evocative. Carl Reinecke's *Ballade*, on the other hand, is clearly painted in the moonlit shades of a nocturnal opera scene that exudes mystery and longing. The slow movement of his Concerto is remarkably similar in tone; and if the outer movements are not particularly dreamy, their gentle lyricism still fits the bill. As in the Mozart, Pahud seems to hone his interpretations to his theme, so that even the finale's virtuoso fireworks (starting at 5'36") are more songful than scintillating when compared with, say, Patrick Gallois (Naxos) or Sharon Bezaly (BIS, 11/13).

Reinecke's Concerto is delightful but it's no masterpiece. Still, it's far more compelling than the Penderecki, which often sounds as if it was scored for a suspenseful, low-budget TV movie (try track 4). Pahud revels in the music's noir-ish tone, however, and his enthusiasm is matched by the Munich Radio Orchestra, who play with character and commitment under Ivan Repušić. They also give exceptionally detailed readings of Takemitsu's *I hear the water dreaming* and Busoni's magnificent Divertimento –

two very distinct works that both make their expressive points through shifting tonal exploration.

The engineers have placed Pahud quite close to the microphone, which not only makes his sound larger than life, it also means we hear his sharp intakes of breath (this is starkly audible when listening on headphones). I found this quite distracting at first, but then the sheer quality of the music-making made me forget it entirely.

Andrew Farach-Colton

'The Godfather'

JS Bach Concerto Movement, BWV1045

Brescianello Concerto in B flat Fasch Concerto,

FaWV LD3 Pisendel Concerto Movement,

Jung II:1. Violin Concerto Movement in A minor

Telemann Concerto, TWV54:D3 Vivaldi String

Concerto, RV158. Violin Concerto Movement,

RV745

La Serenissima / Adrian Chandler vn

Signum © SIGCD602 (66' • DDD)



Who's the one demanding respect here? Well, it's Telemann, who stood at the font for Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. But this is not a trail through Bach family connections, and CPE isn't even included. Rather, it's a look at some of the musical cross-currents running between Italy and Germany in the first half of the 18th century, a stream which Telemann stood in the middle of.

This being an Adrian Chandler project, however, we are invited beyond the normal run. There is only one Telemann piece anyway, a colourful concerto kitted out with trumpets and drums; and even the Bach (an exuberant violin concerto movement from a lost cantata, likewise with trumpets and drums) and Vivaldi (a ripieno concerto and a one-off concerto movement) are relatively unfamiliar. From Chandler's booklet note one detects a keen interest in Pisendel (whose violin sonatas he recorded some years back); the two pieces here include a concerto *allegro* with tinkering in it by Pisendel's teacher Vivaldi and some Bachian (pre?)-echoes, plus a good-natured wind concerto.

It is unlikely, however, that there will be many people who have come across anything by Giuseppe Antonio Brescianello, Kapellmeister to the Württemberg court; his violin-and-bassoon concerto is Vivaldian (especially in its slow movement) but without the same firm sense of direction. The disc ends with another multiple wind concerto by the



Vladimir Jurowski directs the State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia 'Evgeny Svetlanov' in a refined account of Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*

wonderful Fasch, an underrated composer who more than matches Telemann for skill in giving the listener a pure uplift experience.

If Chandler's programming of oddities and fragments sometimes looks like a musicological download, the sound his orchestra makes soon makes you forget that. Bright, clear, open and gloriously brassy, with expansive but controlled wind-playing, rat-a-tat drumming and boldly projected string sound led by Chandler's wheeling and diving solo violin – all is light and energy. In places it is nothing short of magnificent. Listen to the Fasch finale and see if you can keep still! **Lindsay Kemp**

'The Symphonic Euphonium, Vol 2'

M Ball Euphonium Concerto **Gregson**

Euphonium Concerto **Meallor** Euphonium

Concerto **Vaughan Williams** Tuba Concerto

David Childs euphonium

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Ben Gernon

Chandos © CHAN10997 (70' • DDD)



Vaughan Williams wrote his Concerto in F minor for bass tuba and orchestra for

Philip Catelinet, who gave the premiere with his LSO colleagues under John Barbirolli at the Royal Festival Hall on June 13, 1954. Catelinet was quick to suggest to the composer that the piece might also be adapted for the euphonium (tenor tuba). Towards the end of 1956, RVW consented to the idea; but sadly nothing came of it until 2018, when both Oxford University Press and the Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust sanctioned the present, outstandingly idiomatic reworking (with the home key transposed up a fourth to B flat minor) by the brilliant euphonium player David Childs and superbly accomplished orchestrator Rodney Newton. Given the numerous subtle touches and deliciously deft tweaks in instrumentation, to say nothing of the irreproachable agility and eloquence shown by the expert performers here (the sublime central 'Romanza' could hardly be more ravishingly essayed), it's hard to imagine that the composer would have been anything other than delighted.

Originally scored for euphonium and brass band, Michael Ball's 2002 Concerto proves a work of invigorating substance and personality, boasting an especially fetching slow movement that would have pleased his composition teacher at the Royal College of Music, Herbert Howells. It's an

approachable, finely crafted offering, thoroughly deserving of wider dissemination – as, for that matter, is the Concerto that Edward Gregson wrote for David Childs in 2018. It, too, features a genuinely inspired slow movement ('Song without Words'), whose lyrical beauty and translucent textures cast quite a spell. I also love the banter between euphonium and timpani during the cadenza at the end of the satisfyingly cogent first movement (which is bound together by a dramatic five-note motif heard at the outset), while the vigorous finale ('A Celtic Bacchanal') makes quite a splash. Only Paul Meallor's 2017 Concerto slightly underwhelms, for all its undoubted mellifluousness and ample opportunities for solo wizardry (negotiated here with nonchalant aplomb).

As I've already intimated, performances are out of the top drawer. David Childs's contribution throughout strikes me as a marvel of technical security, nimble poise and rewarding musicality. What's more, he enjoys simply superb support from the BBC Philharmonic under Ben Gernon, and everything has been captured with demonstration-worthy realism by the experienced team of producer Brian Pidgeon and balance engineer Stephen Rinker. A classy issue and unexpected treat: do investigate! **Andrew Achenbach**

Liszt 'Dante' Sonata

Italian pianist **Alessio Bax** tells Jed Distler all about his journey with this remarkable piece

Liszt sketched a two-movement work in 1839 called *Fragment after Dante*, premiering it that year in Vienna at a benefit concert to raise funds for erecting a statue of Beethoven in Bonn. The work went through several revisions before attaining its final one-movement form in 1849, with a new title inspired by Victor Hugo: *Après une lecture du Dante* (*fantasia quasi sonata*). Most pianists and music lovers conveniently refer to it simply as the *Dante* Sonata.

At first, Alessio Bax, who has just recorded the work for Signum, harboured mixed feelings about it. 'As I heard *Dante* played more and more at the conservatory where I studied, and in competitions, I got tired of it,' the Italian pianist tells me when we meet at my studio in New York. 'I always felt tension in the music from the first time I heard it, and that the pianists were pushing the limits of sonority. Also, my teacher Joaquín Achúcarro hated the sonata, although he generally loved Liszt.'

But when an Italian promoter suggested that Bax programme the *Dante* alongside Liszt's *St Francis Legends* for a recital, the pianist was intrigued and decided to give it another chance. 'And that's how the journey began,' says Bax – adding that it was less a journey, more 'a love affair'. Many love affairs, however, present challenges, and the *Dante* Sonata-Alessio Bax partnership was no exception. 'In order for the music to truly work and make an impact, it requires the pianist to take a lot of chances. If you play it safe, the whole piece falls apart. One reason is that the *Dante* is very operatic, especially in the way that its inherent drama ties in with the structure.'

One fascinating aspect of the *Dante*'s structure lies within its general lack of artifice. Uncharacteristically, Liszt largely eschews the kind of filigree and decorative sequences that



Playing hard to get: Bax's initial resistance to the 'Dante' Sonata has turned into the type of love affair that presents challenges

abound in, for example, the Hungarian rhapsodies and operatic paraphrases. Big chords dominate the texture, along with heavy doses of taxing octave passages. In a 1995 interview with this writer, the almost 80-year-old Earl Wild likened the *Dante* to an orchestral tone poem arranged for piano, and went on to say that the music could come off as nothing more than an octave onslaught in the wrong hands.

Bax never consults recordings while working on a new piece, although he occasionally listens afterwards. 'I appreciate the electricity that John Ogdon and Georges Cziffra brought to the *Dante*,' he confides, 'but their performances feel slightly reckless, although I still love them. I prefer a somewhat middle ground between Ogdon/Cziffra and the spaciousness of a Claudio Arrau.'

The D minor theme's restless chromatic movement can be likened to the frustration and hopelessness of hell's denizens,


reinforced by a hammered-out tritone, the augmented fourth or diminished fifth known as the 'devil's interval'. 'At the outset you have to convey the sense of terror in that tritone motif,' Bax explains. 'And it's followed by pages and pages of unrelenting dramatic build.'

'Having lived with this score for a long time, I am convinced not only that every note counts – that there is not one wasted note – but also that the rests, the silences are of equal importance. I found it helpful to measure these silences to their exact lengths, yet in the long run it's better to judge the rests in their proper musical context, rather than count them out mechanically.'

When the two-repeated-note octave phrases commence at bar 35, Liszt marks the tempo *Presto agitato assai* along with the expressive indication *lento*. Bax feels that these seemingly different directives are not necessarily contradictory. '*Lento* has more to do with how one shapes Liszt's harmonies,' he says. 'In this sense, one should take Liszt's long pedal markings into consideration. Perhaps they would sound less muddy on an instrument of Liszt's time, yet you try to create forward motion, where the little blurrings make a difference. If you pedal these repeated-note phrases in a way that completely clarifies the harmonies, then you destroy the intention.' Bax then demonstrates this on my studio baby grand, playing with effortless aplomb. As our conversation unfolds, Bax enthusiastically offers further unprompted keyboard examples, making note of them in my printed score for reference.

'The few moments where Liszt gives your hands a break, relatively speaking, are also those that have more musical tension'

He continues: 'The few moments where Liszt gives your hands a break, relatively speaking, are also those moments that have more musical tension, such as the chords alternating between the hands starting at bar 54. They may be easier to play, yet Liszt marks *disperato*, so you cannot relax for a second. You don't have to be so loud, but you still have to convey an underlying energy.' Bax explains that on many occasions Liszt goes against your expectations: 'Take that big accelerando from around bar 167 that reaches a climax with a cadenza,' he cites by example. 'Then suddenly he breaks out into a mysterious *sotto voce* passage, where you have rhythmic displacements. It's a challenge to coordinate and make sense of all this. Look at how the dramatic tension builds as Liszt gets quieter and quieter at the end of the *Tempo rubato* section (bars 273-88), which cuts off with a triple-*piano* A natural staccato octave, much like the end of the Liszt B minor Sonata. And that's followed by an entire bar of rest, and with a fermata: for me, that silent bar (bar 289) is the most terrifying moment in the entire sonata!'

While Liszt's *Dante* Symphony specifically depicts episodes in *The Divine Comedy*, the sonata is only programmatic by suggestion. Still, Bax feels that the music's dramatic contrasts and changes in mood directly correlate with Dante's infernal sojourn. 'Within its 15-minute span the *Dante* Sonata embodies the most extreme of human feelings, yet it hangs together, even in a fragile way,' he says. 'To me, it is both a very personal and a universal masterpiece.' 

Our review of Bax's 'Dante' Sonata recording will appear in March



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Chamber



Charlotte Gardner enjoys chamber-scale flute concertos by Quantz:
'There is a hugely sensitive chamber awareness between the Elysium Ensemble and soloist Greg Dikmans' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 54**



Liam Cagney on some trends in modern music for ensembles:
'Many of these pieces have an admirable clarity that hints at the positive influence of experimental rock' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**

JS Bach

Six Flute Sonatas, BWV1030-1035

Michala Petri *rec* Hille Perl *va da gamba*

Mahan Esfahani *hpd*

OUR Recordings (F) 6 220673 (74' • DDD/DXD)



Mahan Esfahani is characteristically pugnacious in his defence of these

six works, in terms of their quality and authenticity, and even the choice of instruments on which he and his colleagues choose to perform them. The quality of any piece of music – especially if the product of one of the great geniuses of the canon – is non-negotiable; but the truth is that none of its numerical successors matches the B minor Sonata, BWV1030, in terms of scale, ambition or emotional reach.

Each is, though, performed with the utmost sincerity and seriousness of approach. While the tonal and expressive range of the recorder, viol and harpsichord may appear constrained in comparison to, say, flute, cello and piano, in the hands of foremost players such as these, even a relatively lightweight work such as the C major Sonata, BWV1033, comes over as the ideal demonstration of a particular facet of the composer's style and the performers' abilities.

Michala Petri uses a range of recorders, preferring Moeck Elert instruments for slow movements and Moeck Rottenburgh (tenor) or Mollenhauer (alto) for faster music. Esfahani's harpsichord is a modern construction inspired by a Berlin instrument from 1710. Hille Perl plays a Matthias Alban gamba from 1686. Ornamentation is liberal but always tasteful, and balanced by an innate feeling for when to play the music just as plainly as it appears on the page. Esfahani's exploratory approach to accompaniment and continuo realisation, and judicious deployment of the registrational variations available, keeps the textures

buoyant. The generously reverberant acoustic of the Garnisons Kirke in Copenhagen presents the instruments in a realistic balance, with the harpsichord perhaps dominating only slightly. Sample, though, the range of colours these players evoke in their deliciously imaginative presentation of the ground-bass *Andante* of the G minor Sonata, BWV1034.

David Threasher

JS Bach • Handel

'An Imaginary Meeting'

JS Bach Violin Sonatas – No 4, BWV1017;

No 5, BWV1018; No 6, BWV1019 Handel

Violin Sonatas – HWV359a; HWV371

Lina Tur Bonet *vn* Dani Espasa *hpd*

Aparté (F) AP219 (74' • DDD)



As its name suggests, 'An Imaginary Meeting' musically enacts one of the

greatest missed opportunities in musical history – a face-to-face encounter between Bach and Handel, the two giants of the Baroque era, who never met despite being born in the same year and the same country, and indeed also despite Bach himself having gone to considerable effort to make a meeting happen on the two occasions he got wind of Handel's returning briefly from London to visit his birth town of Halle. The first time Bach travelled there from Cöthen but arrived the day after Handel had left; the second time, in 1729, he sent his son Wilhelm Friedemann to set up a meeting, but received no response.

So here instead we have three violin sonatas from Bach and two from Handel, programmed alternately as a musical conversation. Plus, for added appropriateness, their composition dates mostly correspond to the timings of those missed opportunities, Bach's three probably having been written between around 1723 and 1725, while Handel's HWV359a dates from around 1724; and while HWV371 by

contrast is likely to date from around 1749, within a year of Bach's death, it's a welcome inclusion nevertheless.

As for the actual performances, I'm slightly on the fence. On the one hand, Lina Tur Bonet on a Nicolò Amati violin has a wonderful smoky yet clean-toned elegance to her sound which I love, and harpsichordist Dani Espasa is the perfect foil on his delicately ringing Franco-Flemish copy. On the other hand, much as the rule of thumb with Baroque phrasing is for there to be a curve to the sound, the degree of curve (as in hairpin swells and decrescendos) heard in Bach's programme-opening Sonata in G minor, BWV1017, is slightly more than I find comfortable, even when Tur Bonet couldn't be delivering those swells with more subtlety and control. This tends to be the approach going onwards, too. However, this is also unquestionably fine playing, and I'm far from deaf to delights such as the moody shading Tur Bonet brings to the *Largo* of BWV1018 in A minor or the refined quality her overall legato approach brings to all the programme's passagework, however bouncy. So I'm going to conclude that this comes down to taste rather than quality, meaning that I urge you to listen and make up your own mind.

Charlotte Gardner

Bartók • Korngold

Bartók Piano Quintet, Sz23

Korngold Piano Quintet, Op 15

Piers Lane *pf* Goldner Quartet

Hyperion (F) CDA68290 (73' • DDD)



In an interesting note for this valuable if somewhat uneven coupling, Ben Winters

makes the point that 'both quintets were written when their composers were in their early twenties'. However, the principal difference, to my ears, is that Korngold the outrageously gifted prodigy was, in musical terms, born fully formed whereas if you



Utmost sincerity: Michala Petri, Hille Perl and Mahan Esfahani perform Bach with an engaging range of colours

didn't already know that Bartók had authored his quintet, you'd probably never guess, certainly not from this performance, well played though it is. Some little while ago I reviewed a recording of the Bartók featuring the pianist Alexander Lonquich, with violinists Barnabás Kelemen and Vilde Frang and friends, which has a grandeur, impetuosity, rhapsodising sense of engagement and urgency that rather relegates Piers Lane and the Goldners to the sidelines.

In short, with Lonquich et al you can tell that what you're listening to amounts to some sort of musical prophecy, whereas with Lane and the Goldners you can't. Try the dramatic onset of the first movement's development section, where Lane and the Goldners (6'38") suggest little sense of shock, either in the quiet preparation for the passage or its thundering initial chord, which Lonquich and colleagues project so powerfully (7'17"). Then, at the start of the Scherzo, there's just a smidgen more of a lilt from the Lonquich ensemble, who also manage more in the way of local colour for the finale, especially the teasing slow introduction.

But come the opening of Korngold's Quintet, where you could as well be

sampling a chamber reduction of lavish music for the movies *The Sea Hawk* or *Elizabeth and Essex*, and the Lane/Goldner Quartet combination comes into its own. Korngold had been wowing his audiences since the age of 13, when his amazing Sinfonietta was premiered under Felix Weingartner. Talk about a mature heart in a young ribcage. Performance-wise the Goldners indulge some well-aimed expressive portamentos but what is most important is that their performance, Lane's too, really does get the message across. The beautifully played central *Adagio* (13'27" to compare with 11'58" on the marginally less imposing Stott/Doric Quartet version) should be enough to convince you, which for me makes the Bartók coupling a useful reference point rather than a secure recommendation in its own right. The Korngold, though, is thoroughly recommendable, and the sound is excellent in both works.

Rob Cowan

Bartók – selected comparison:

Lonquich, Frang, Kelemen, Kokas, Altsaedt
(10/19) (ALPH) ALPHA458

Korngold – selected comparison:

Stott, Doric Qt (5/12) (CHAN) CHAN10707

Beethoven · Reicha

'Symphonies de salon'

Beethoven Septet, Op 20

Reicha Grande Symphonie de salon No 1

Le Concert de la Loge

Aparte © AP211 (75' • DDD)



Two sestercentennial composers are celebrated here: one with an early chamber

work that barely wants for recordings, the other with a large-scale nonet from a quarter of a century later, receiving its first outing on disc, prepared from a manuscript recently discovered in the Bibliothèque National de France.

Reicha's *Grande Symphonie de salon* in D is in four movements lasting in all around 35 minutes. Despite the addition to the Beethovenian septet forces of oboe and a further violin, it doesn't in fact *sound* a bigger work than the Beethoven, perhaps because the German composer leads for the most part with the clarinet, with the support of bassoon and horn, while the Bohemian (perhaps counterintuitively, given his expertise in wind-writing) gives

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much of the thematic heavy lifting to the first violin, especially in the long sonata-form opening *Allegro*. In fact, in its melodic contour and leisurely unfolding, this movement brings Schubert more readily to mind – although Reicha can surely have heard little if any of the Austrian's music.

The *Adagio* goes for unease in place of restraint, despite a near note-for-note quotation of a theme from the corresponding movement of Haydn's Symphony No 99. The Minuetto (a scherzo in all but name) offers a testing solo to the (valveless) horn, while the finale comes closest to Beethoven in its jittery motivicism. The Beethoven itself is nigh-on indestructible and played, like the Reicha, with a great deal of panache by this group, drawn from the period-instrument ranks of Julien Chauvin's Le Concert de la Loge. The Reicha is a worthwhile and welcome addition to the repertoire, and those who have followed these players' Haydn 'Paris' Symphonies (1/17, 1/20) will be well acquainted with their high standards of performance. The booklet recounts the rediscovery and reconstruction of the Reicha, along with two slightly later works for not nine but 10 players, the prospect of which will surely whet the appetite of those seeking refuge this year from Beethoven overkill. **David Thresher**

Beethoven

String Quintets – Op 29; Op 104. Fugue, Op 137

WDR Symphony Orchestra

Cologne Chamber Players

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA585 (66' • DDD)



It's perhaps not surprising that Beethoven's string quintets feature

less highly in his output than do similar works by Mozart and Schubert in theirs. Of the three full-scale works, only one was conceived from the outset for the combination of string quartet with added viola (rather than cello, as per Schubert's Quintet), and it is an early work, rather than a late one of depth and maturity.

Nevertheless, it's a shame that Op 29 isn't heard more. The enhanced instrumentation has the same effect that it had on Mozart and Schubert, granting Beethoven a broader canvas on which to create something more expansive and lyrical. It's close in time to the Op 18 quartets but looks forward to the expressiveness of Op 59 – and perhaps even further ahead, to the sound worlds

Mendelssohn and Brahms would create in their music for enlarged string groups.

Op 104, on the other hand, is an 1817 arrangement of one of Beethoven's most popular early chamber works, the C minor Piano Trio from his first published set of 1795. Perhaps the transfer to the first violin of lines conceived for the piano's right hand is not ultimately wholly convincing but this is nevertheless a viable alternative way of hearing this youthful work, refracted through the imaginative lens of a composer almost a quarter of a century older. These players from Cologne's broadcasting orchestra do both works proud, capturing the warm, middly sound world of Op 29's opening movement and the scampering virtuosity of both finales. The encore is a *kleine Fuge* (1'49") – little more than a squib but a product of Beethoven's late engagement with knotty counterpoint.

David Thresher

Brahms

'The Five Sonatas for Violin & Piano, Vol 2'

Violin Sonatas – No 2, Op 100; No 3, Op 108.

Violin (Clarinet) Sonata No 2, Op 120 No 2

Ulf Wallin *vn* **Roland Pöntinen** *pf*

BIS Ⓢ BIS2419 (67' • DDD/DSD)



The black-and-white publicity photos in the CD booklet show two quite severe-

looking musicians (the pianist seems to be glowering), a charming bit of irony given the smilingly affectionate nature of their performances. Harriet Smith, reviewing the first instalment of this two-part survey (9/19), noted that Wallin and Pöntinen tend to favour spacious tempos, and the same is true here. Such broad pacing allows the players time to highlight and savour details as well as to be scrupulous in their attention to clean articulation and rhythmic clarity. Their patience is most effective in the long-limbed phrases of Op 120 No 2 (originally for clarinet or viola). Perhaps the *Allegro appassionato* second movement has a faint whiff of world-weariness at such a relatively relaxed pace, but the theme-and-variations finale is beautifully shaped. Listen, say, to the third variation (starting at 3'11"), where they really take the *grazioso* marking to heart, and note how seamlessly they dovetail their alternating lines.

The slow movement of Op 108 is another highlight. Ulf Wallin's rich, singing tone exudes nobility and warmth in equal measure, and his double-stops (as at 1'13") have a sweetness that brings Fritz Kreisler to mind. The Sonata begins

impressively, too. I like how Wallin makes those sudden hairpin crescendos in the opening theme feel appropriately woozy, for example, although he seems to forget these marks when they return in the recapitulation. In general, however, I think the performances of both this Sonata and Op 100 could benefit from a slightly tighter grip. Wallin and Pöntinen's consistent emphasis on the lyrical is admirable but can result in stodginess where impetus is required. And perhaps it's worth noting, too, given the decidedly relaxed character of their interpretations, that the duo seem to be playing to the back row in a good-sized hall rather than suggesting a more intimate space. That said, the recording quality is ideally balanced and most flattering to both musicians.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Coke

Three Cello Sonatas

Raphael Wallfisch *vc* **Simon Callaghan** *pf*

Lyrta Ⓢ SRCD384 (72' • DDD)



All three sonatas on this typically enterprising Lyrta anthology date from

the years 1936 to 1941 – an especially fecund period for the composer, which also saw the completion of his Second Symphony (which bears a dedication to Rachmaninov), two piano concertos (Nos 3 and 4 – recorded by Hyperion on Vol 73 of its Romantic Piano Concerto series, 11/17), as well as the 24 Preludes and powerfully taut 15 Variations and Finale (both for piano). I enthused about these last two when assessing Simon Callaghan's exemplary premiere recordings (Somm, 8/15), and if none of the works here rises to the same level of inspiration, there's still plenty to reward the patient listener.

Take the First Sonata's absorbing opening *Allegro moderato* with its frequently bony textures and adventurous harmonic reach; or the two sets of sparkling theme and variations that comprise the finales of the Second and Third Sonatas (in the former there's a quotation from the first movement of Rachmaninov's Fourth Piano Concerto). Elsewhere, a generously lyrical impulse comes to the fore in the slow movements and No 1's concluding 'Quasi una fantasia', where Lyrta's excellent annotator, Rupert Ridgewell, is surely not mistaken in detecting strong stylistic and even thematic links with Frank Bridge (namely his glorious Cello Sonata) and Bloch (*From Jewish Life*).

No lost masterpieces, then, but a thoughtful, quietly individual voice does emerge with repeated hearings. Inquisitive readers can rest assured that Callaghan and the admirable Raphael Wallfisch strain every sinew in their passionate advocacy of Roger Sacheverell Coke. First-rate sound and expert balance, too. **Andrew Achenbach**

Gál

'Music for Viola, Vol 1'

Suite concertante, Op 102a^a. Divertimento, Op 90 No 3^b. Viola Sonata, Op 101^c. Trio, Op 94^d

Hanna Pakkala *va* ^d**Takuya Takashima** *ob*

^{bd}**Reijo Tunkkari** *vn* ^c**Irina Zahharenkova** *pf*

^a**Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra /**

Sakari Oramo

Toccata Classics © TOCC0535 (81' • DDD)



'This sweeping lyricism ... fundamental to Gál's style' is annotator

Richard Marcus's description of the opening melody of the *Suite concertante* (1949) and could stand for all four works here. I doubt that the Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra and Sakari Oramo had encountered much of Gál's music over the years but they play the four movements of the Suite (given here, for the first time, in its orchestral version) with relish.

The star of the show is their principal viola, Hanna Pakkala. Her formidable, prize-winning technique, rich and full tone and dedication to neglected works make her an ideal exponent. Her intonation is absolutely perfect, too. An intuitive chamber player, her account with Reijo Tunkkari (the Ostrobothnian CO's concertmaster) of the Divertimento for violin and viola (1969, the last of a series of three duos initiated in 1958) is a marvel of musicality, both players immersed in Gál's inexhaustible invention; listen especially to the quicksilver evocation of elves, 'Folletti', or delicate interlude, 'Figurina'.

The Viola Sonata (1942) shows Gál in more serious mood, not so much from when it was composed (the darkest period of his life) but in essaying a form perfected by Brahms. The opening *Adagio* is extraordinarily varied, alternating light and intensity caught with finesse by Pakkala and her sensitive accompanist, Irina Zahharenkova. Better still is the Trio for oboe, violin and viola (1949), the longest work here. Suffice it to say that this is music-making – from composer and players alike – of the highest order. Recommended with all possible enthusiasm. **Guy Rickards**

Quantz

Flute Concertos, QV5 –

No 116; No 162; No 178; No 236

Greg Dikmans *fl* **Lucinda Moon** *vn*

Elysium Ensemble

Resonus © RES10252 (71' • DDD)



Johann Joachim Quantz cuts an intriguing figure on the contemporary

visibility front. On the one hand, he was renowned in his time as one of Europe's finest flute players, working in Dresden, then famously at the Berlin and Potsdam courts of flute-playing King Frederick the Great; and equally he was renowned as the author of the influential 1752 treatise *Essay of a Method for Playing the Transverse Flute*. On the other hand, while he composed a whopping body of flute music – over 300 concertos, around 230 sonatas, plus various trio sonatas, duets and solos (and for some context, Vivaldi composed around 230 solo concertos for his own instrument, the violin) – all this music was largely unavailable to the public at large: Frederick took entire possession not only of all Quantz's Potsdam and Berlin music but of all his Dresden concertos as well.

Now we have the luxury of applying the treatise's ideals to the actual music, though, and that's precisely what Greg Dikmans and the Elysium Ensemble have made a point of doing with these three concertos for flute, strings and continuo (plus the major-key *Cantabile* from the E minor Concerto, QV5:116): ideals which on paper boil down to the *galant* desire for naturalness and restraint (eg sentiment taking precedent over galloping speed when it comes to tempos), and every note's function painstakingly thought through.

They have genuinely hit those nails squarely on the head, too. Tempo-wise alone, compare the leisurely flow of their A minor Concerto, QV5:236, with the pace of the Les Buffardins version (Accent), which comes in at 6'25" as opposed to the Elysium's 7'46". Or indeed the brightly urgent chuggings to be heard across Concerto Armonico and Miklós Spányi's Quantz concertos programme (Naxos). In fact tone is another thing worth mentioning, because it's a notably soft-focus one, which reminds me of night music in the best possible way.

Speed or bright zinging tone aren't necessary for keeping things interesting either. Take the way in the F major Concerto, QV5:162, subtle tension is spun through carefully measured

emphasis and silence, and all with a hugely sensitive chamber awareness between ensemble and soloist; listen out too for cellist Josephine Vains's attentive duetting with Dikmans.

It's true that there's not a lot of recorded competition when it comes to this repertoire, but even if there were I'd wager this would still sit near the top.

Charlotte Gardner

Rădulescu

'The Complete Cello Works'

Das Andere, Op 49. L'exil intérieur, Op 98^a. Lux animae, Op 97. Pre-Existing Soul of Then, Op 76

Catherine Marie Tunnell *vc* ^a**Ian Pace** *pf*

Mode © MODE317 (64' • DDD)



Having released editions of Cage and Feldman, Mode is now releasing the complete

works of the Romanian spectralist Horatiu Rădulescu (1942-2008). In the 1970s Rădulescu developed a brand of spectralism independently of his French counterparts – indeed, he referred to the latter as a Parisian 'mafia' and claimed to have invented the current himself in his 1969 work *Credo* for nine cellos (not included here). Rădulescu's music draws on his theory of 'sound plasma', micro-sonorities exploding traditional categories, which entails unique notation (a mix of graphic and standard; each string on a separate stave) and close collaboration with musicians. Longstanding Rădulescu advocates Tunnell (his widow) and Pace here give performances of precision, commitment and imagination.

Das Andere (1984) is one of Rădulescu's best-known works. It can be performed on any string instrument (I recently saw Garth Knox give a fine viola performance) and asks the performer to enter into and induce a state of trance. Using techniques from *flautando* to *arco*, Tunnell gives a compelling performance where glistening harmonics jostle with shrill hints of Byzantine melody. Though the cello often sounds like a string quartet, Tunnell resists bombast, slowly building intensity across the single-movement work's 18 minutes. *L'exil intérieur* (1997) is the most conventional work here. A cello sonata, it draws on Romanian folk material, Byzantine chant, ring modulation-derived pitch material and, in the finale, an attempt at a pan-cultural Ur-music. At times there is austere grandeur in a monorhythmic cello line backed by iridescent piano chords.

Rădulescu never shied from transcendental allusions. *Pre-Existing Soul of Then* (1992/2003) systematically moves through 96 frequency areas in a haunting microtonal wandering. This version superimposes two cello recordings to achieve Rădulescu's desired final result. Rounding off the disc, *Lux animae* is (writes Samuel Dunscombe) 'a set of 21 "windows" through which the light of the soul may shine'. More straightforwardly, it uses *scordatura* and a mathematically complex form to generate Rădulescu's characteristic fusion of quickness and mystery.

The engineering is crisp yet warm. A fine introduction to Rădulescu for the uninitiated (as is the previous disc in the series, 'Works for Organ & for Cello').

Liam Cagney

Telemann

Six Frankfurt Sonatas, TWV41

Gottfried von der Goltz *vn* Annekatrin Beller *vc*

Torsten Johann *hpd/org* Thomas C Boysen *theorbo*
Aparté © AP217 (66' • DDD)



When Bruce Haynes proclaimed 'the end of early music' in the title of his book from

2007, he did not predict the release of this lovely recording from Aparté. Simply put, there's nothing quite like good Baroque music played well, and this is a disc that captures the modesty, curiosity and unbefuddled clarity of period performance from years past. These six sonatas by Telemann – from Frankfurt in 1715, dedicated to Prince Johann Ernst IV of Saxe-Weimar, who would die only a few months after their publication – are in many respects simple; one might even mistake them for boring. But brought to life by Gottfried von der Goltz and his stellar continuo team, they are lifted into the territory of enchantment.

The sound, by Nicolas Bartholomée and Maximilien Ciup, is superbly (and intriguingly) executed too. The pair create an overwhelming sense that presented here are 'just' the musicians, gloriously unimpeded by wires or microphones. The mastering makes wonderful work of the natural grit and wiry thrill of gut strings that is so often over-polished in early music recordings (the *Allegro assai* in the Sonata in B minor takes this to full timbral whack). And why should they need it anyway: polish they have plenty. Von der Goltz plays with abundant lusciousness on his Testore of c1720. The Sarabanda from

the Sonata in D major is slinky, sensual stuff. Both melody and bass – though here it is more love duet than melody and mere bass line – meet in romantic sway, caressed in inflection. Or the *Adagio* at the heart of the Sonata in G minor, in which pungent, spine-straighteningly acerbic projection melts into wistfulness. The highlight is the Sonata No 4 in G. The opening *Largo* is lovely, followed by a joyous *Allegro* in which superb continuo support from Annekatrin Beller on the cello is constantly coloured by the subtlest of harmonic winks and raised eyebrows. The final *Allegro* blossoms out of diatonic bliss into contrapuntal playtime. **Mark Seow**

'The Lyrical Clarinet, Vol 3'

G

Brahms Hungarian Dance No 1 Debussy

Préludes, Book 1 - No 8, La fille aux cheveux de lin. Suite bergamasque - No 3, Clair de lune
Fauré Après un rêve, Op 7 No 1. Sicilienne, Op 78
Franck Sonata Gaubert Fantaisie Kreisler
Liebesleid. Schön Rosmarin Liszt Liebestraum, S541 No 3 Mendelssohn Song without Words, Op 38 No 2 Paradis Sicilienne Saint-Saëns
Le carnaval des animaux - Le cygne
Schumann Träumerei, Op 15 No 7
Michael Collins *cl* Michael McHale *pf*
Chandos © CHAN20147 (70' • DDD)

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GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

GROUP INNOVATION

Liam Cagney examines the different approaches of composers and ensembles in championing new musical explorations



The Australian Elision Ensemble push instrumental boundaries in search of visceral musical experiences

Discussions of music since 1900 tend to be too composer-centric. Recently musicologists have pushed back against this tendency and sought to give due credit to the musicians and institutions. This *Collector* looks at trends in recent music through some of today's top ensembles.

Cologne-based **Ensemble Musikfabrik** has a refreshingly unashamed focus on innovation. 'Fall' collects three works based on falling. Ferneyhough's *La chute d'Icare* (previously recorded by Elision – Kairos, 7/10) is inspired by Bruegel's famous painting, which inspired Auden's famous poem. The music begins as an ultra-complex, texturally dense polyphony and ever so gradually thins out to reveal instrumental filigree. Musikfabrik's performance is wonderfully stylish, and Carl Rosman's virtuosity on clarinet – trills, multiphonics, registral jumps – is mind-boggling (though given he is also the soloist on the Kairos recording, it might have been interesting to hear a new take). From the sublime to

the ridiculous: Stephan Winkler's *Von der Gewissensnot der Insekten* ('On the moral dilemma of the insects') concerns a drunk poet falling from a fourth floor window while singing Mozart (Winkler adapts a poem by Traugott Neimann). *Von der Gewissensnot* derives musical material from a phonetic reading of the story. Over insect-like percussion scrapes, drunken woozy wind lines and brass punches are enacted with aplomb. Closing the disc, Oscar Bettison's *Livre des Sauvages* (2012) is a remarkable work. Based on a bizarre hoax manuscript which, in the 19th century, a French Abbé put forward as a sort of American Rosetta Stone, Bettison's three-movement work updates Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* for the present day: thrilling, wry, alternately rhythmically driven and sedate, and vividly performed. As a bonus, the CD booklet folds out into a poster of a Gerhard Richter abstract painting.

Champion of the so-called New Complexity, the Australian **Elision Ensemble** has for three decades

challenged the boundaries of what's playable, working closely with composers such as Liza Lim and Richard Barrett. Written for Tristram Williams, Lim's *Roda – The Living Circle* for trumpet solo alternates declamatory rasp, muted noise and mellifluous lyricism to create a compelling soliloquy. Over its half-hour duration, Barrett's *world-line* explores lap steel guitar against different combinations of piccolo trumpet/quarternote flugelhorn, percussion and electronics. As ever with Barrett, the results are at different times violent, delirious and gentle, but always rich. Lap steel soloist Daryl Buckley plays fearlessly, as he does on Siemens Award-winner Timothy McCormack's *subsidence* for four-hand slide guitar, wherein the amplified instrument is as a stethoscope revealing the microsonorities hiding within ostensible noise. Throughout the disc, Elision's prodigious virtuosity pushes beyond itself to what lies on the other side: queer, strange, insatiable vitality.

Dither are an electric guitar quartet based in New York City. Their third album, 'Potential Differences', collects 12 pieces, most of them from the past 15 years and attesting to how younger composers, weaned on alternative rock and electronica as well as classical styles, are melding these influences. Many of these pieces have an admirable clarity that, as well as attesting to Dither's fine playing, one can't but link in stylistic character to the positive influence of experimental rock. Gyan Riley's *The Tar of Gyu* nods to 1970s rock in its harmonised lines. Eve Beglarian's *The Garden of Cyrus* uses repeated staccato pulses to generate a coasting polyphony. The centrepiece is Jascha Narveson's *Ones* in four movements ('The Wah One', 'The Driving One') – no dry study but a wide-ranging workout bubbling with ideas. As a closer, Dither realise James Tenney's *Swell Piece* (1967) with e-bow sustained tones, lush and beautiful. Dither's performances are full of personality, their 'chops' impeccable.

Another electric guitar quartet, Sweden's **Krock**, commissioned one of the most affecting Irish works of recent years. Seán Clancy's quartet *Forty-Five Minutes of Music on the Subject of Football* is modelled on a signal moment in Irish cultural memory: the first half of the match between the Republic of Ireland and Italy at the 1994 World Cup in the USA. Clancy maps the game's events (who has the ball at a given time, Ray Houghton's goal, etc) on to the musical material and time scheme. Performed with pathos by Krock, the result

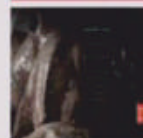
is a fascinating exploration of culture and nostalgia, and also nods to the Dublin underground rock scene. Along with some like-minded composers, Clancy is based at the Birmingham Conservatoire; and coming from the Conservatoire's in-house record label (distributed by NMC), this disc opens a window on to the healthy music scene there.

Finally, in 2017 Ireland's **Crash Ensemble** celebrated its 20th anniversary with *Crashlands*, a series of concerts held in picturesque settings around Ireland. This disc collects 20 pieces commissioned for the tour, from national (Dennehy, Barry et al, and emerging voices such as Amanda Feery) and international (Julia Wolfe, Nico Muhly) composers associated with the ensemble. Highlights of the Irish works include *fiáin* by 2019 Siemens Award recipient Ann Cleare, full of whiplash glissandos and unison noise outlines; *Chorale* by Gerald Barry, a typically smart-dishevelled song-without-words led by discordant guitar and crash cymbal; and *music for donkeys who like music* by Andrew Hamilton, a joyously melodic closer replete with nature sounds. Highlight of the international contributions is the Captain Beefheart-esque *Antenoux* by Tansy Davis, its lysergic electric guitar and bass guitar lines snapping in and out of focus. The Bang on a Can members' contributions somewhat blend into each other, avoiding risks. The 20th anniversary of Crash, an ensemble who have made an enormous contribution to Irish music, is a cause for celebration, and this disc is a fitting show of the ensemble's quality. **G**

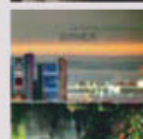
THE RECORDINGS



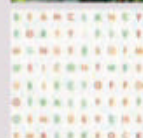
Various Cpsrs Fall
Ens Musikfabrik
Wergo Ⓢ WER6869-2



Various Cpsrs world-line
Elision Ens Huddersfield
Contemporary Records Ⓢ HCR21CD



Various Cpsrs Potential Differences
Dither
New Focus Ⓢ FCR235



Clancy Forty-Five Minutes of Music on the Subject of Football **Krock**
Birmingham Rec Co Ⓢ BRC004



Various Cpsrs Crashlands
Crash Ens
Crash Records Ⓢ CRENSCD01



A new CD from Michael Collins is like walking into a three-star Michelin restaurant: you don't know exactly what's on the menu but you know whatever is on offer is going to taste wonderful. On this occasion, he offers an extended first course of *amuse bouches* followed by a substantial main course in the form of the Franck Sonata. The former come in the shape of 13 short works, transcriptions of violin, flute and cello pieces, of the kind that Kreisler, Casals and other great instrumentalists of their era might have ended their recitals. The longest of these is Philippe Gaubert's *Fantaisie* (1911) at 7'29" and the only original clarinet-and-piano work on the disc.

The remaining 12 titles are all arrangements by Collins's partner ('accompanist' seems inadequate here) Michael McHale, a role he has fulfilled in superb style on the duo's two earlier volumes of 'The Lyrical Clarinet': doff of the chapeau. If you wondered whether you really need a recording of *Clair de lune* played on the clarinet, the first few bars of the opening track will persuade you (I can see this becoming a firm favourite on certain classical music stations). Whether the two Kreisler titles are as successful is a moot point. Everyone will have their own favourites and preferences. Perhaps the biggest surprise, even though the piece started life as a song, is the completely convincing *Liebestraum* No 3.

The arrangement for clarinet and piano of Franck's Violin Sonata is by Collins himself (for clarinet in A, that is, rather than B flat). It is the first commercial recording I have come across of this masterpiece played on the clarinet, though it works so well with only a few minor adjustments that you wonder why it has not been attempted before (or so seldom). There are only a handful of double-stops to be substituted, and few passages that rise beyond the clarinet's upper range and which have to be taken down an octave. It's a triumph. True, there are times when one misses the violin's impassioned intensity in passages in the second and fourth movements (though McHale's deft and lucid contribution is by no means underplayed) but, once again, one has to salute the extraordinary facility and irresistibly seductive, lyrical grace of Michael Collins's playing, surely one of his instrument's greatest living exponents.

Jeremy Nicholas

'The Russian Album'

Demenga New York Honk Prokofiev

The Love for Three Oranges - March

Rachmaninov Cello Sonata, Op 19

Shchedrin In the Style of Albéniz

Shostakovich Cello Sonata, Op 40

Christoph Croisé vc Alexander Panfilov pf

Avie Ⓢ AV2410 (74' • DDD)



It's not just Yuja Wang whose encores threaten to steal the

show. Christoph Croisé and Alexander Panfilov's 'Russian Album' is rounded off with three absolute zingers. Shchedrin's homage to Albéniz wears its Spanish style very much *à la russe*; Croisé and Panfilov are by turns deadpan and suave. Prokofiev's March from *The Love for Three Oranges* is tart and droll. And Thomas Demenga's *New York Honk* is, as the name implies, a hoot: a Broadway boogie complete with taxi horns and traffic sounds, thrown off by Croisé and Panfilov in a trifle over two dazzlingly virtuoso minutes.

Unfortunately that's where the good news ends. Pairings of the Rachmaninov and Shostakovich cello sonatas are a growth area; I reviewed one by Victor Julien-Laferrrière and Jonas Vitaud just a few weeks ago (Alpha, 1/20), and they were just the most recent entrants in a crowded field. In these circumstances, the appeal of Panfilov's extrovert old-school virtuosity and Croisé's big, warm tone and sensitively applied portamentos has to be set against the fact that the recorded balance between the two instruments in the Rachmaninov is so intractable.

It's less of an issue in the Shostakovich; the sepulchral cortège at the end of the first movement is just one of many rewarding moments in a searching, tender and atmospheric overall performance. But in the Rachmaninov a booming, congested piano sound cloaks everything with a thick, buzzing haze. Even when, in the two outer movements, Croisé's cello just about manages to cut through, it's at the expense of the detail buried within the piano part. The problem is least pronounced in the slow movement; but essentially, if the Rachmaninov is your priority, you should look elsewhere. There's ample choice. **Richard Bratby**

Vernon Handley

Geraint Lewis pays tribute to the beloved British conductor marked by an uncompromising integrity, a selfless approach to his craft and a strong devotion to the cause of British music

When an unsuspecting player innocently prefaced a question at rehearsal with a polite, 'Mr Handley ...?' there was an impatient interruption: 'Please call me anything – Tod, Vernon – even Darling – *anything* but Mr Handley!' There was, of course, a twinkle in the eye. Born in Enfield in 1930, Handley, it transpires, actually disliked both his given names (Vernon George) with some vehemence and immediately adopted the affectionate nickname 'Tod' bestowed on him by his family as a result of his being pigeon-toed, which caused him to 'toddle' as he walked.

Tod Handley became one of the most distinguished and beloved British conductors of his generation – beloved partly because of his complete lack of any affectation and also in relation to his selfless devotion to the cause of British music. These twin qualities are often cited as reasons for his failure to cut through to a greater degree of international celebrity. They remain, however, the abiding hallmarks of a musician of uncompromising integrity – and were partly inherited from his own dedication to the example of his mentor, Sir Adrian Boult.

Educated at Enfield Grammar School, Balliol College, Oxford (where he read philology), and the Guildhall School of Music, London (his main instrument the double bass), Handley always aspired to a conducting career but found any training path elusive until he wrote to Boult and met him. He found – after a harrowing session of harmony and counterpoint – that they bonded over Bax's Third Symphony, which Boult had produced as a form of 'sight-reading' (and which Handley actually knew). Outside any formal arrangement, Handley immediately became Boult's pupil and in time was sufficiently trusted to act as his assistant – as he was for the classic TV production of

The Dream of Gerontius made at Canterbury Cathedral in 1968. Boult would also help him achieve a first professional engagement: his debut with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in 1960 was followed by many return visits and a role as guest conductor.

The defining move which established Handley's career had about it a rather typical air of the unexpected: in 1962 he became director of music to the Borough of Guildford. Here, he worked hard to build a proper quasi-professional orchestra for the region, and the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra

soon became a byword for innovation and adventure. Handley made pioneering recordings with them of Bax's *Symphonic Variations* (with Joyce Hatto as piano soloist) and Fourth Symphony as well as Finzi's great choral work *Intimations of Immortality*. With a sense of loyalty which became entirely characteristic of him, Tod retained his position in Guildford until 1983, many years after he had himself moved firmly into the first division. He had gradually been noticed in the 1960s by the big London orchestras and in 1970 stood in for André Previn at several concerts with the LSO. I was lucky enough

to attend one of these at the Llandaff Festival that year and have an indelible memory of a seemingly tall man with a ramrod back, severe crew cut and unfashionably long baton.

Handley, although technically English, was largely Celtic in origin, with a Welsh father and Irish mother, something often reflected in his passionate and mercurial nature. He was soon back in Llandaff (where his father had been a member of the cathedral choir) throughout the 1970s as a guest with the BBC Welsh Orchestra (in 1976 renamed the BBC Welsh SO) and I observed at close quarters his remarkable technique: the long baton held flexibly by thumb and forefinger waving unhindered over long

*All that Boult had inherited from Nikisch
had been safely passed on to Handley,
flourishing with renewed individuality*

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1958 – *Meets his mentor*

Starts to work with Sir Adrian Boult as pupil and assistant

• 1965 – *Makes his first recordings*

With the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra he makes the world premiere recording of Bax's Symphony No 4

• 1974 – *Classics for Pleasure debut*

Begins a fruitful partnership with both EMI and the London Philharmonic Orchestra in works by Vaughan Williams

• 1983 – *A major London appointment*

Becomes Associate Conductor of the LPO

• 1984 – *An iconic recording*

With Nigel Kennedy and the LPO he records Elgar's Violin Concerto for EMI – a benchmark for the modern age to stand with Menuhin's conducted by Elgar himself

• 1986 – *Recognition abroad*

Appointed Chief Conductor of the Malmö Symphony Orchestra in Sweden – one of several partnerships outside the UK

• 2003 – *Recognition for recording achievements*

Gramophone gives him a Special Achievement Award; in 2007 he receives the Classical Brit Award for Lifetime Achievement

• 2008 – *Dies on September 10 at home near Abergavenny*



distances; a total absence of histrionics and physical showmanship; violins divided antiphonally left and right; a rigorous attention to structure and architecture; selfless concern for the needs of any soloist; the air of good-humoured humility. When, in 1974, Boult himself came to conduct in the same studio the parallels stood out immediately – and the penny dropped! All the features which Boult had inherited from his own mentor, Arthur Nikisch, in Germany had been safely passed on to the next generation, where they flourished with renewed individuality.

Over the decades Handley forged lasting relationships with most of Britain's orchestras, even if his only principal conductorship was of the Ulster Orchestra from 1985 to 1989. His vast discography (notably for Chandos, Lyrita and EMI) eloquently reflects these many partnerships, and his broad repertoire encompasses the complete symphonies of so many British masters – chronologically, from Stanford to Simpson; alphabetically, from Arnold to Vaughan Williams – as well as hitherto unknown swathes of Bantock, Howells and Bliss among many others. He was also a sought-after partner

for countless concerto recordings. At the height of his career, he frequently worked abroad and his repertoire was wide – but he insisted on including one British work in every foreign programme. Such devotion may have resulted in his being unfairly pigeonholed by some, but this is one badge he would happily wear with pride. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



'Bax - The Symphonies'

BBC Philharmonic / Vernon Handley
Chandos (12/03)

Often plagued by illness in his last years, Handley was nevertheless determined to set down his Bax symphony cycle for posterity. Recorded 2002-03, this was the one major cycle that his legions of fans

most wanted. With devoted support from the players and staff of the BBC Philharmonic, this definitive set remains his eloquent last major testament and is positively ablaze with Celtic fire.

Instrumental



Jed Distler enjoys fine accounts of Stravinsky and Rachmaninov:

'The Shrovetide Fair stands out for Poghosyan's masterly textural layering and resounding climaxes' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 64](#)



Marc Rochester has been listening to a range of recent organ albums:

'Kevin Bowyer has a reputation for disinterring and breathing life into long-forgotten and obscure repertory' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 68](#)

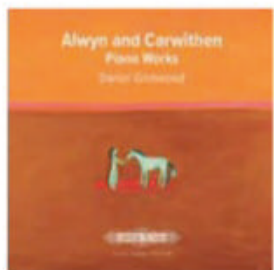
Alwyn • Carwithen

Alwyn Fantasy-Waltzes. Twelve Preludes

Carwithen Sonatina

Daniel Grimwood *pf*

Edition Peters © EPS007 (73' • DDD)



This is not the first time that the works of both husband and wife have appeared

together on the same disc, nor the first time that the *Fantasy-Waltzes* have kept company with Doreen Carwithen's *Sonatina*: Mark Bebbington's recording for Somm was well received by Edward Greenfield in 2014. My only other exposure to her piano music, the Piano Concerto (another Bebbington unearthing – 1/15), left me somewhat indifferent. Her *Sonatina* made a much stronger impression: its three brief movements would make an excellent second-half opener, its sparse, elegiac central *Adagio* followed by a sparky *moto perpetuo* which Daniel Grimwood dispatches with aplomb.

William Alwyn's 12 Preludes come next. Composed in 1958, they were written, according to the composer himself, 'when I was experimenting with short note groups each with a strong tonal centre; a different group of notes is used for each Prelude'. This, I think, will not be discernible to most and is certainly not central to one's enjoyment of these miniature poems of wildly contrasting character. Some are heavily bombastic and use the full sonority of the piano (Grimwood is happy to oblige); others are toccata-like (Nos 4 and 12). I was most taken by the quieter ones: No 5 in D, for example, a touching elegy achieved with the greatest economy. Altogether a lovely set.

For the 11 *Fantasy-Waltzes*, composed in 1954-55, Alwyn wrote that he drew his inspiration from 'Chopin, Ravel ... Johann Strauss II and ... Tchaikovsky'. He might well have added Godowsky's name. Grimwood's main competition is from

John Ogdon's 1984 recordings made in Snape Maltings in the presence of the Alwyns. Ogdon provides greater dynamic contrast and makes more of inner voices but I prefer Grimwood's more straightforward, less interventionist approach, his tighter control and his cleaner textures. Ashley Wass, whose *Fantasy-Waltzes* are on the first of his two volumes of Alwyn's piano music for Naxos, is also worth considering, though the piano is too distantly placed for my taste.

On balance, I would go for the newcomer in both Preludes and *Fantasy-Waltzes*. Supported by the William Alwyn Foundation, the disc is another feather in the cap of this enterprising pianist.

Jeremy Nicholas

Fantasy-Waltzes, Sonatina – selected comparison:

Bebbington (4/14) (SOMM) SOMMCD0133

Fantasy-Waltzes – selected comparisons:

Ogdon (11/85^R, 7/86) (CHAN) ► CHAN8399

Wass (2/08) (NAXO) 8 570359

JS Bach

Solo Violin Sonatas and Partitas, BWV1001-1006

Thomas Zehetmair *vn*

ECM New Series © ② 481 8558 (127' • DDD)



Two fine instruments were used for these recordings, a c1685 violin by a South

Tyrolean master for the Partitas, and Zehetmair's own 'wonderfully preserved' Johann Ulrich Eberle violin from around 1750 for the Sonatas. The varieties of tone on offer – in both staccato and legato passages – range from Zehetmair's characteristic graininess to quiet, ethereal meanderings, often within a mere few seconds of each other. Take the First Partita, where individual movements dovetail, the commanding yet inflected profile of the opening Allemanda and then the reflective Double, which whispers like a half-forgotten rumour. Then the contrast between the Corrente and the Double Presto, which for all its reckless speeding

never sounds inflexible. There are various instances where Zehetmair embellishes repeated material, as in the First Partita's Sarabande, which again is followed by a Double heard as if from the far distance.

Fugues are imbued with an impressive sense of character while the gentle pulsing of the A minor Sonata's Andante (with more decorated repeats) maintains its expressive intensity in spite of its relatively swift pace. Once into its stride the Chaconne (12'30") keeps up the pace: at 9'06" what normally arrives as hard-hitting rhythmic mobility is refashioned as totally free, unfettered I'd say, as is the passage that succeeds it, while the movement's close defies tradition with unexpected quietness. The C major Sonata's opening Adagio labours as if aching at the joints, though the ensuing fugue blossoms from an effective *piano* at the start.

The Third Partita's Preludio bounds in with great gusto, though here as elsewhere in the set you're aware of a distant knocking sound, probably the force of the bow or of Zehetmair's finger pads on the instrument's fingerboard. Also, there's the distant presence of what sounds like traffic outside the Church of St Gerold in Austria. One assumes that while the church's generous acoustic suited Zehetmair's musical needs to a T, close mics were necessary in order to offset the potentially blurring effect of excessive reverberation – and maybe block out some of the traffic too! But I hasten to add that the traffic element was more apparent through my Bose noise-cancelling headphones than through my Cambridge/Bowers & Wilkins room set-up.

Zehetmair is among the most characterful of living violinists, a forceful personality whose ego is employed at the service of whatever music he happens to be playing. Everything he records is worth hearing and this new solo Bach set (his second of this repertoire, and quite different to his first), which is very well annotated, is no exception. Although very dynamic and expressively inflected it's not



Dynamic and expressively inflected: Thomas Zehetmair brings his unique force of character to Bach's solo violin music

exactly a comfortable listen – Zehetmair has too much artistic integrity to compromise for the sake of mere comfort – but it'll certainly make you think again about music that in any case defies an interpretative straitjacket. But the best there is? Not in my view. Among digital contenders, I incline more towards such equally stylish but less relentlessly assertive options as Isabelle Faust, Alina Ibragimova, Ning Feng and, for a period-instrument option, Giuliano Carmignola, who employs many of the stylistic devices that Zehetmair favours here. I'd say that, in the final analysis, his set is the best bet of all.

Rob Cowan

Selected comparisons:

Ibragimova (11/09) (HYPE) CDA67691/2

Faust (6/10, 11/12) (HARM) HMC90 2059/2124 (oas)

Feng (3/18) (CHCL) CCS39018

Carmignola (2/19) (DG) 483 5050GH2

Zehetmair (APEX) 2564 64375-2

JS Bach • D Scarlatti

JS Bach Cantata No 147 – Jesus bleibet meine Freude^a. Cantata No 208 – Schafe können sicher weiden^b. Flute Sonata, BWV1031 – Siciliano^a. Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV639^a. Italian Concerto, BWV971. Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland, BWV659^a. Organ Concerto, BWV596 – Sicilienne^c. Prelude, BWV855^d. Wachet auf, ruft

uns die Stimme, BWV645^a (transcr ^aKempff, ^bPetri, ^dSiloti, ^cTharaud) **D Scarlatti** Keyboard Sonatas – Kk32; Kk87; Kk98; Kk141; Kk377

Polina Osetinskaya *pf*

Melodiya © MELCD100 2602 (74' • DDD)



Polina Osetinskaya imbues each of this disc's Bach and Scarlatti selections

with a full-bodied sonority built from the bottom up, clear and flawless articulation at every level, and an earnest demeanour. You'll rarely hear the Scarlatti Kk141 D minor Sonata's repeated notes dispatched with such honest uniformity, but, then again, you won't hear anything of Martha Argerich's added playfulness and sheer abandon. Similarly, Kk98's double notes may not be the lightest of the litter but they are focused beyond belief.

Yet Osetinskaya labours Kk377's downbeats, while her sectional ritards cause the introspective B minor Kk87 to ramble, as opposed to the far shapelier flexibility of Vladimir Horowitz's 1980s performances. Conversely, Osetinskaya's like-minded approach to the D minor Kk32 yields palpable melodic tension and release.

In the collection's lone non-hyphenated Bach selection, the *Italian Concerto*, Osetinskaya fares best while displaying her superb finger legato in the slow movement, although the finale's emphatic accentuations and dynamic contrivances impede forward momentum.

Wilhelm Kempff's Bach transcriptions are generally thicker and more bass-orientated than Busoni's counterparts, and suit Osetinskaya's pianism well. In *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* and *Wachet auf*, for example, she avoids certain pianists' tendency to slow down as the music progresses. But her solemnly measured rendition of the *Siciliano* lacks the buoyancy distinguishing Kempff's less-pedalled traversal, not to mention the classic Dinu Lipatti recording. She does not convey Alexandre Tharaud's Bach BWV596 *Largo* transcription with the suppleness heard in the transcriber's own recording. The Bach/Egon Petri *Sheep may safely graze* receives a mellifluous yet ponderous treatment that contrasts to Leon Fleisher's winged transparency. On the whole, a uniform timbral and emotional aura prevails over a potentially diverse array of compositions, and, as such, it's best to sample this collection in small doses.

Jed Distler

JEAN-GUIHEN QUEYRAS
ALEXANDRE THARAUD

COmplICES



Friends and frequent recital partners Jean-Guihen Queyras and Alexandre Tharaud are reunited here for an album conceived as a collection of short stories, presenting both celebrated and little-known masterpieces of the repertory. If the art of transcription is the hallmark of great performers, it must be said that our two partners are past masters at it! Throughout this lyrical yet virtuosic programme, music lovers will meet one surprise after another.



Chopin · Liszt · Scriabin

'Storyteller'

Chopin Four Ballades **Liszt** Three Petrarch Sonnets **Scriabin** Piano Sonata No 4, Op 30. Two Poems, Op 32

Anna Fedorova *pf*

Channel Classics © CCS4229 (69' • DDD)



After her selection of fantasies on her previous Channel Classics disc (11/18),

the Ukrainian pianist Anna Fedorova here moves to poems, broadly speaking: in particular poems with a narrative element, which is more or less explicit in the Chopin Ballades, if you take on board the plausible but weakly substantiated notion that they relate to actual poems by Adam Mickiewicz.

Fedorova's Chopin is unfailingly sensitive, poetic and tasteful, the phrases flexibly shaped even when the technical going gets tough. In Liszt and Scriabin, too, she never forces her tone and never loses her cool. Whether that makes her an exceptionally cultured and civilised artist or one who has yet to find a way to fully personalise her interpretations might be debated. She could certainly adopt a wider dynamic range without detriment to the music and possibly to its great benefit. On a scale between over-cautious and reckless she would definitely be placed more towards the former. If she is a 'storyteller', as in the title of the disc, then she is more an unobtrusive guest than a demonic Ancient Mariner.

The booklet does Fedorova no favours by describing her as 'one of the world's premier pianists'. Such meaningless puff only serves to focus attention on what is missing from her playing: a sense of compelling drive (as offered by, for example, Perahia), or an openness to breathtakingly unexpected turns of phrase (Hough). Meanwhile Nelson Goerner shows that the constraints of a Pleyel from Chopin's time need not preclude passionate virtuosity.

David Fanning

Chopin – selected comparisons:

Perahia (12/94) (SONY) SK64399

Hough (5/04) (HYPE) CDA67456

Goerner (3/10) (NIFC) NIFCCD003

Khachaturian

Piano Sonata. Children's Album, Book 1.

Two Pieces. Poem. Sonatina. Toccata

Iyad Sughayer *pf*

BIS © BIS2436 (75' • DDD/DSD)



Apart from the ubiquitous Toccata and the Piano

Concerto, championed and first recorded by William Kapell with Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony in 1946, Khachaturian's piano music has never achieved the popularity accorded that of his Soviet colleagues Prokofiev, Shostakovich or Kabalevsky. The latest of recent attempts to bring this relatively small but interesting body of music to a wider public is by the Palestinian-Jordanian pianist Iyad Sughayer. His new BIS release contains roughly half of Khachaturian's catalogue of piano works.

Emil Gilels was among those who included the Piano Sonata in their repertoires and it's easy to understand why. It opens with an antic, almost circus-like atmosphere, played here with a compellingly bright sound and infectious rhythmic verve, before veering into more serious matters. In the calm of the prevailing *Andante tranquillo* of the Sonata's longest movement, Sughayer evokes a desolate loneliness that seems particularly apt. The raw energy and motoric rhythms of the third movement are exhilarating and delivered with perfect clarity. The 1959 Sonatina seems a preliminary study for the larger, denser Sonata three years later, its simpler materials wielded with similar mastery.

The first of Khachaturian's two *Children's Albums* seems more akin to a Poulenc-inflected *Kinderszenen* than a distant relative of either *For Children* or *Mikrokosmos*. Sughayer approaches these 10 pieces with an emotional forthrightness and simplicity that allows their lyricism, seriousness and exuberance full rein. The earliest works on the programme, the *Two Pieces* ('Waltz-Caprice' and 'Dance') of 1926 and the ardently romantic 1927 *Poem* indicate that, though Khachaturian the composer may have been a late bloomer, he found his distinctive voice early.

The recorded sound of Sughayer's Steinway is a little in-your-face, yet it seems appropriate for Khachaturian's sonorous palette. Overall, Sughayer portrays Khachaturian's affective extremes with a conviction that diverts attention from the not insignificant technical challenges involved. The inerrant focus of these performances reveals the folk origins of Khachaturian's idiom to an extent sometimes obscured by his opulent orchestral writing. It's a release that leaves one eager to hear Sughayer in other

repertory while eloquently arguing that Khachaturian's piano music deserves re-evaluation as something more than teaching pieces. **Patrick Rucker**

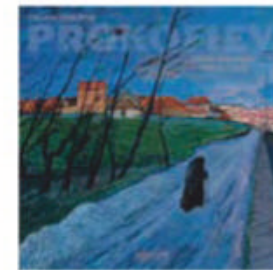
Prokofiev

Piano Sonatas – No 6, Op 82;

No 7, Op 83; No 8, Op 84

Steven Osborne *pf*

Hyperion © CDA68298 (74' • DDD)



Steven Osborne's assured mastery in a wide range of repertoire continues

to expand and amaze. At first hearing, the pianist seems to be imparting a fresh spin to these frequently recorded sonatas. Closer scrutiny, however, reveals the extent to which Osborne takes Prokofiev's texts seriously. His attention to accents and careful textural layering brings refreshing lightness and mobility to the frequently hammered-out repeated notes in the *più mosso* section of the Sixth Sonata's *Allegro moderato*, while the *Allegretto*'s steady staccato chords take on the character of a finely honed woodwind ensemble. Listeners accustomed to Sviatoslav Richter's lilting third-movement tempo might find Osborne's more inward yet eloquently sustained reading comparatively slow, yet Prokofiev himself marks *lentissimo*. Osborne tellingly characterises the finale's emotional contrasts and observes the composer's gradual acceleration to tempo when the main theme returns, unlike Richter, who simply forges ahead.

The outer sections of the Seventh Sonata's *Allegro inquieto* take on a driving, slightly aggressive tone on account of Osborne's avoidance of legato where Prokofiev doesn't indicate it, yet I prefer Pollini's faster flexibility and variety of articulation. Despite its breathtaking rapidity, Osborne's *Precipitato* is musical to the core, where melodic phrase-shaping takes precedence over motoric momentum. Yet the same can be said for a more viscerally engaging recording on the Dux label from the relatively unknown Wojciech Kocyan, who gives one of the most inspired and imaginative versions on disc.

Osborne is at his best in Sonata No 8. He holds attention in the long and difficult-to-sustain first movement through his meticulous organisation of dynamics and gauging of climaxes. The central *Andante sognando* can absorb Osborne's affectionate yet never indulgent lyrical inflections (Gilels and Bronfman are more

straightforward and businesslike); in this sense he's a slower Ashkenazy. However, no pianist in my experience has matched Osborne's finale for acuity of touch, pinpoint transparency and airborne suppleness. The music dances off the page, tickles the ear, engages the mind and, for once, sounds far shorter than its nine-minute duration. In addition to Hyperion's sound at its finest, Christina Guillaumier's booklet notes provide valuable historic and analytical contexts for all three works.

Jed Distler

Sonata No 7 – selected comparison:

Kocyan (3/08) (DUX) DUX0389

Rachmaninov · Stravinsky

Rachmaninov Piano Sonata No 2, Op 36. Lilacs,

Op 21 No 5. Six Moments musicaux, Op 16

Stravinsky The Firebird – Suite (transcr Agosti).

Three Movements from Petrushka

Kariné Poghosyan *pf*

Centaur © CRC3772 (78' • DDD)



The powerful, impassioned pianism displayed in the Armenian-American

pianist Kariné Poghosyan's all-Khachaturian solo debut CD (Grand Piano, 2015) remains evident throughout this ambitious follow-up release. She confidently launches into *Petrushka*'s 'Danse russe', where the bouncy conversational left-hand details catch your ear to the point where you can take Poghosyan's poised right-hand octaves for granted. Some may find her rhetorical breadth in 'Chez Petroushka' a tad emotive, more appropriate to Tchaikovsky than to Stravinsky, yet the characterisation befits the storyline and the music's harmonic tenderness.

The Shrovetide Fair, however, stands out for Poghosyan's masterly textural layering and resounding climaxes, where she strikes a judicious balance between control and abandon. Poghosyan's dry-point articulation in *The Firebird*'s 'Danse infernale' holds its own in comparison with Beatrice Rana's slightly faster rendition (Warner, 11/19), although Jenny Lin's recording (Steinway & Sons, 7/14) is more convincingly inflected. But the rolling arpeggios in the Finale's peroration maintain a steady course, with the resounding melody in full focus.

Even in its compressed 1931 revision, Rachmaninov's Second Sonata remains a diffuse composition, which is why terse and headlong interpretations seem to work best (think Jean-Yves Thibaudet and Alexis

Weissenberg) for the first movement. As such, Poghosyan's freewheeling subjectivity will strike listeners as either refreshingly individual or blatantly over-the-top. Her finale makes light of the thick textures, although her recent live Carnegie Hall performance inspired more ferocity in the cascading runs, not to mention an immense sonority that even this splendidly engineered recording cannot fully suggest.

Poghosyan's poetic impulses and penchant for alluring voicings find a suitable and congenial context in the *Moments musicaux*. She exerts no effort over the swirling Nos 2 and 4, yet I'm more riveted by her eloquent reserve in No 3, where the silences prove just as telling as the notes themselves. **Jed Distler**

Schubert

'Vol 1'

Piano Sonata No 20, D959. Klavierstück,

D946 No 3. Six Moments musicaux, D780

Llŷr Williams *pf*

Signum © ➔ SIGCD831 (76' • DDD)

Recorded live at Dora Stoutzker Hall, Royal

Welsh College of Music & Drama, Cardiff,

February 1, May 3, 2018

Schubert

'Vol 2'

Piano Sonata No 21, D960. Klavierstück,

D946 No 1. Wanderer-Fantasie, D760

Llŷr Williams *pf*

Signum © ➔ SIGCD832 (76' • DDD)

Recorded live at Dora Stoutzker Hall, Royal

Welsh College of Music & Drama, Cardiff,

October 11, 2018; January 31, 2019



Llŷr Williams's first commercial disc – an all-Chopin selection including the Preludes – Quartz, 8/06) – received quite harsh criticism from Bryce Morrison. Since then positive reactions to his concert performances and discs (notably his complete Beethoven sonatas on Signum) have outweighed negative ones, though not without some reservations. While I couldn't possibly go so far as Morrison's verdict of 'student-level performances' suffering 'the musical equivalent of middle-age spread', I fear my reactions to his Schubert discs are not much more sympathetic.

These two volumes include the twin peaks among the sonatas – the mighty A major and the otherworldly B flat – alongside the *Wanderer* Fantasy and the

Moments musicaux, and it certainly takes some self-assurance to start a Schubert survey this way. His technical fluency is unquestionable, and execution is remarkably clean given that these are live performances. But for someone who claims a special affinity for opera and the voice, and who regularly accompanies singers, not least at the Cardiff Singer of the World competition, his Schubert suffers from an equally remarkable lack of lyricism, drama and flow.

The heavenly *Andante sostenuto* of the B flat Sonata, for instance, feels as though stuck in a traffic jam. Not that glacial tempos are necessarily a problem, as Richter's transcendental account proves. The main problem is that the flow is so often disturbed either by lack of imaginative phrasing or by rapidly predictable agogic hesitations, right from the opening of the same sonata's first movement. Tone and voicing are not Williams's strong suits either. Later in this same movement, he persists in emphasising the treble when the actual theme material is in the tenor (as almost all performers realise, and as Schubert's sketches confirm). Once in a while when Schubert is at his most Beethovenian – as in the finale of the A major Sonata, which is actually modelled on the corresponding movement of Beethoven's Op 31 No 1 – there is some compelling urgency in the playing. But more often these readings feel, well, just like readings, prior to the emergence of true interpretation, and with little sign of affinity between performer and composer. Perhaps the hall and/or the piano are partially responsible for what sounds like poor tone production. But if so, why release the recordings at all?

I wish I could say that the two first volumes of Williams's Schubert odyssey have whetted my appetite for the rest of his journey. Sadly, no. **Michelle Assay**

Sweelinck

Esce Mars. Fantasia. Fantasia crommatica a 4.

Mein junges Leben hat ein Endt. Phantasia a 4.

Paduana lachrimae. Praeludium toccata.

Toccata. Toccata primi toni. Toccata 2^{di} toni.

Ut re mi fa sol la a 4 voci

Richard Egarr *hpd*

Linn © CKD589 (76' • DDD)



Despite his enormous influence on Dutch and north German music, especially the composers Bach would study in his youth, Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck has



Sustained eloquence: Steven Osborne gives masterly accounts of Prokofiev's 'War Sonatas' – see review on page 63

a precarious hold on the repertoire. Harpsichordists will occasionally play one of his fantasias or toccatas, and his variations on secular songs and dance melodies make more frequent interstitial appearances on concert programmes. But a whole programme of Sweelinck, a Dutch composer born in 1562, is a rarity.

Richard Egarr, who devotes his most recent disc to 11 of the composer's most appealing keyboard works, explains why: 'Sweelinck's music has suffered from many objective, colourless and academic performances and recordings in the name of "authenticity".' Without naming names, it's fair to say that Egarr is right, though Sweelinck presents uncommon challenges to contemporary performers and listeners alike. Even more than the English virginalists, with whom he was contemporary, Sweelinck delights in music that divides and subdivides thematic material, building up intensity through accretion of fast-moving variants on the basic line that, if rendered pedantically, inevitably sound both cluttered and ponderous at the same time.

This is a fundamental misinterpretation of what the music is about, says Egarr. In the booklet, he quotes a rare first-hand account of an evening spent with Sweelinck

at the harpsichord, when he was in 'a very sweet humour' and played for hours for his guests. Sweelinck, avers Egarr, was Dutch and thus his 'world was hugely colourful, full of many international influences and religious diversity (all of which were tolerated in the name of commerce) and he provided music which brilliantly reflects this'.

Egarr doesn't stack the decks for his argument by limiting himself to the handful of Sweelinck works that might be deemed popular today. He includes the *Paduana lachrimae* and the variations on *Mein junges Leben hat ein Endt*, which are among the better-known of the composer's works. But he renders *Mein junges Leben* in a style almost more austere (and with flowing, even brisk tempo) than he uses for the supposedly more abstract fantasias and toccatas. And yet both are effective and appealing.

In the fantasias and toccatas, he allows air in between episodes, letting the music pause and relax before the division of material begins again. And that division is never strictly mathematical. Faster-moving music will sometimes pass by as a flourish and sometimes inflate and stretch the musical arc expressively. He deploys ornamentation effectively, and sometimes

breaks or rolls a chord figure to clarify where one line ends and another begins.

About midway through the *Fantasia crommatica*, the tenor and bass lines begin another meditation on the half-step descending line, and Egarr allows this to function a bit like the slow movement in a sonata, a chapter of placid intimacy and meditation. The chromatic ground is now distended to semibreves, the tenor responds in crotchets and a few lines later the engine is purring along again, leading to semiquaver figuration and then rapid triplet figures. But the ear doesn't notice these ratios, only an increase in urgency and colour. Egarr's particularly piquant quarter-comma meantone tuning adds a frequent dash of lemon and lime to the mix. He hopes, he says, 'to persuade you the listener of the glorious nature of this rich and wonderful music'. Mission accomplished. **Philip Kennicott**

Tchaikovsky

Aveu passionné, Op *posth.* Capriccio, Op 8. Dumka, Op 59. Humoresque, Op 10 No 2. Piano Sonata No 2, Op 37. Two Pieces, Op 1. Six Pieces on a Single Theme, Op 21

Peter Donohoe *pf*

Signum ® (two discs for the price of one) SIGCD594 (85' • DDD)

BACH BARTÓK

Julien Libeer

Beyond their lifelong interest in keyboard instruments of all types (organ, harpsichord, and clavichord in the case of Bach; modern piano as a percussion instrument in the case of Bartók), other shared concerns connect these two giants of classical music who at first glance appear to be polar opposites. The juxtaposition of the two composers is not the least appeal of this album which also marks Julien Libeer's first project for harmonia mundi: this ardent advocate of a clear and direct approach deftly combines keen intuition with a sense of formal rigour to bring four masterful examples of the 'suite' genre into a dialogue spanning across the centuries that set them apart.



Photo: © Green Room Creatives - Athos Burez

HMM 902651

New collaboration



Russian and Soviet music and culture run like a river through Peter

Donohoe's distinguished career. His joint silver medal at the 1982 Tchaikovsky Competition cemented a relationship with the country, its musicians and its public that is ongoing.

My instant reaction on pushing 'play' and hearing the first bars was 'Ah – this is going to be good'. And so it proves, perhaps the most consistently enjoyable and satisfying recording of Tchaikovsky piano solos of recent years. (Signum is a little shy about the timings of the two discs. Don't be misled: the total length is 84'56" – basically the length of a normal CD that has, drat it, overrun by five minutes. Personally, I'd have cut the Capriccio and got it all on to one disc.) There's a lightness of touch, a crisp transparency and clarity of texture that sends the opening 'Scherzo à la russe' spinning off into the realms of sheer delight, leaving you to wonder, as does Donohoe in a brief booklet aside, why Tchaikovsky's piano music should remain so infrequently performed in concert programmes, 'containing as it does all of the composer's characteristic harmony [and] wonderful melodic gift'.

Six Pieces on a Single Theme (from 1873) is a case in point, a work that illustrates both Tchaikovsky's limitless imagination and fecundity (incidentally, for those who collect such musical references, No 4, 'Funeral March', quotes the *Dies irae*). Donohoe enterprisingly includes *Aveu passionné*, an Op *posth* using material from the abandoned ballet score of *Voyevoda*, but it is the *Grande Sonata* No 2 that is the central feature of this varied programme. I have to say that Donohoe's performance belies its reputation as a problem piece. It can sound relentless and contrived in some hands. Not here, though I wonder if the opening salvo is a little too jaunty to be truly *risoluto*. No matter. Donohoe's convincing conception of the work is one of heroic grandeur without rodomontade.

After that comes the popular 'Humoresque' (I confess I did not know that the middle section is based on a French folk song that Tchaikovsky heard in Nice) and finally the *Dumka* in, if not the most compelling recording since Horowitz, then certainly the best-recorded (Snape Maltings; Nick Parker and Mike Hatch). And Donohoe, like

Horowitz, makes the not unreasonable decision to play the final C minor chords *pp* instead of the written *ff*. A very fine issue indeed. **Jeremy Nicholas**

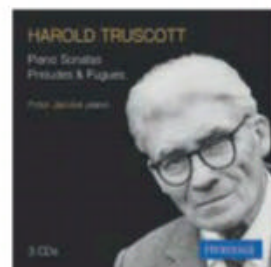
Truscott

Piano Sonatas – No 3; No 5, 'In memoriam Nicolai Medtner'; No 6; No 9; No 11; No 12; No 13; No 15; No 17. Two Preludes and Fugues

Peter Jacobs *pf*

Heritage (M) (3) HTGCD304 (2h 59' • DDD)

Recorded 1981-84



Harold Truscott (1914-92) is a telling example of a composer little

appreciated in his lifetime and barely more so now: to the extent that these three Altarus LPs (and one British Music Society tape) were the first recordings of his music, have had few successors and are only now being reissued. Yet Truscott had an innate understanding of the piano, his 17 sonatas (preceded by three surviving such works with an unfinished 18th) at the core of an output drawing directly while never slavishly on the Austro-German Classical style in which he was early immersed.

The 10 sonatas here provide a valuable overview. The Third Sonata (1948) is a fine instance of Truscott's earlier lyricism and (in its outer movements) fine-honed rhetoric, with the Fifth (1955) an 'in memoriam' to Medtner that captures the essence of his idiom without imitation. The Sixth (1956) leavens melodic expansiveness with a heady cumulative momentum, while the Ninth (1960) is the most exacting in its pianistic brilliance. The compact one-movement Seventh (1956) most clearly points the way forwards by making possible the quixotic duality of the Eleventh (1964), the playful concision of the Twelfth and the tensile force of the Thirteenth (both 1967). The Fifteenth (1981) is a sonatina in size if not in scope, with the Seventeenth (1982) a marvel of motivic ingenuity and formal compression but not in the least aphoristic.

Peter Jacobs plays throughout with the linear clarity and judicious phrasing needed. Sound is clear if just occasionally confined, and Guy Rickards astutely dovetails his observations with extracts from Truscott's own commentaries. Well worth reissuing, and well worth acquiring.

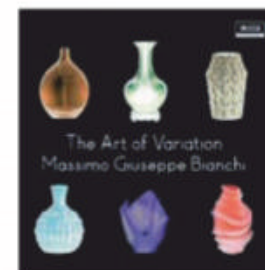
Richard Whitehouse

'The Art of Variation'

Czerny Variations on a Favourite Viennese Waltz, 'Sehnsuchtswalzer', Op 12 **Diabelli** Waltz in C **Godowsky** Passacaglia **Lachenmann** Fünf Variationen über ein Thema von Franz Schubert **Schubert** Andantino varié, D823 (arr Tausig). Impromptu, D935 No 3. Variation on a Waltz by Diabelli, D718. Variations, D156

Massimo Giuseppe Bianchi *pf*

Decca/Universal (E) 481 8602 (73' • DDD)



Here is a programme that would rarely (never?) be presented in the concert hall,

one specifically tailored to the medium of the compact disc in a way that is itself all too seldom encountered. This is not because the repertoire is comparatively unfamiliar (though that in itself, sadly, would make it unacceptable for many concert promoters) but because it does not fit the conventional structure of a piano recital. Where would you put the interval, even after changing the running order (as I would) and placing the Godowsky later in proceedings?

The disc's title could equally well be 'Schubert Variations', for that is the composer common to all the works here with the exception of Diabelli's famous waltz theme which opens the programme, followed by Schubert's own little-known variation upon it. After these two briefest of morceaux comes the longest and by far the most technically demanding work here: Godowsky's *Passacaglia* (1927), its 44 fleeting variations, cadenza and fugue based on the opening bars of Schubert's *Unfinished* Symphony, and a challenge for any pianist.

Massimo Giuseppe Bianchi is a new name for me. He is clearly an intense and accomplished musician, to judge by his first-rate essay in the CD's booklet, which, however, is silent on every aspect of his biography (the internet reveals little). He is also an exceptionally fine pianist, to judge from his handling of Godowsky's labyrinthine textures; and if he is not quite the equal of Marc-André Hamelin in his two recordings – no one has yet matched the Canadian's extraordinary combination of power, lucidity, grasp of detail and pianistic finesse – he is a worthy champion of this weighty work.

Few of the remaining 32 tracks last longer than two minutes: Czerny's four variations on a Schubert waltz (1820) utterly belie his reputation as a mere purveyor of studies; Schubert's own

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

PIPE DREAMS

Marc Rochester enjoys working his way through a varied selection of recent organ discs, from the over-familiar to the deeply obscure



Kevin Bowyer breathes life into the dustier corners of the organ repertoire

The dream for those of us who spend many of our waking hours listening to new recordings of organ music is to find one that consists entirely of impressive music which is new to us, played on an organ that has not featured on any recording that has thus far come our way, and played by an organist whose name is unfamiliar to us.

That is the world of dreams. But dreams do, sometimes, come true, and this one does so with a vengeance with the first disc in my round-up of recent releases. **Synagogue Organ Music** includes music by several hitherto overlooked Jewish composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries interspersed with Hebrew chants intoned evocatively by Cantor Assaf Levitin, and played on the magnificent Furtwängler & Hammer organ in Verden Cathedral in Germany by Stephan Lutermann. In every respect this is an eye-opener of a disc.

The closest reality usually gets to my critic's dream is a disc of familiar pieces spiced up by a few rarities designed to show off a particular organ and intended to draw our attention to an emerging star

organist. The emerging star here is the Canadian organist Maxine Thévenot, who opens her **Prairie Sounds** recital in effervescent style with David L McIntyre's aptly named *Joyfully* and keeps her infectious enthusiasm in top gear throughout a programme ranging from French Classical repertoire to Franck and Dupré by way of a Flor Peeters-inspired set of variations by Denis Bédard on Vaughan Williams's great hymn tune 'Sine nomine', which gives us a wonderfully illuminating tour across the Casavant organ of Holy Rosary Cathedral in Regina, Saskatchewan. I find the title confusing, but there are enough references in the copious booklet notes to prairies to compensate for music which, for the most part, is very much confined to the indoors.

The British organist Kevin Bowyer has established a unique reputation for turning impossible dreams into reality by disinterring and breathing life into long-forgotten and obscure repertoire. He's been at it again with Vol 2 in his series **Green and Pleasant Land**, which aims to present on disc every one of the 363 pieces that appeared in a periodical

called *The Organ Loft*, which ran from 1900 to 1915. This disc includes 18 of those pieces (so, by my calculations, we can expect the full series to run to almost 20 discs) and the composers include such forgotten names as George Clarke Richardson and William Richard James McLean, while the names vaguely familiar to me (but, I suspect, few others) include Bertram Luard-Selby and Edward d'Evry. It would be a miracle if any of these short, inconsequential pieces were anything more than charming trifles. Bowyer is not in the miracle business but his engagingly communicative playing and Priory's dazzling recording of the Beverley Minster instrument turn a potential sow's ear into a thoroughly pleasurable listening experience.

Mention **Johann Pachelbel** to most and they respond with the single word 'Canon'. The trouble with having penned (or not, as the case may be) the most popular piece of 'Baroque music' is that everything else gets overshadowed by it. Pachelbel was one of the most important and significant organ composers in late 17th-century north Germany and CPO is currently releasing his entire organ output on disc. For the three discs that constitute Vol 3 the company has roped in the services of three organists – Michael Belotti, Christian Schmitt and James David Christie – playing between them four organs. While this certainly shows the range and imagination of Pachelbel in chorale-based works, the generally unsympathetic recording makes it all rather heavy going, even if it is serving a very valuable historical function.

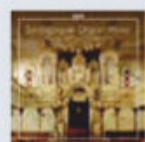
Tom Winpenny and the organ of St Alban's Cathedral are certainly no strangers to the record catalogues but a disc devoted to the organ music of **Francis Grier** offers a chance to hear them in something less familiar. The versets on the *Te Deum*, each prefaced by chanting from the Cathedral's Lay Clerks, probably try too hard to make an impact, but many of the other smaller pieces make for interesting listening and, as ever, Winpenny is a compelling advocate.

There is nothing new or unexpected about **Ton Koopman's** recital of Bach, Clérambault, Daquin and the two Couperins played on the magnificent and historic organ in the Chapelle Royale at Versailles. But the sheer pleasure of hearing Koopman's unbounded enthusiasm for this music and the stunning sound of this 1710 instrument is ample justification for listening to it. Another well-known player whose every footstep one happily

follows even when he is treading some very well-trodden ground is Colin Walsh. None of the 14 pieces of **European Organ Music** he has recorded on the Lincoln Cathedral organ is in any way unusual or unfamiliar to all except complete organ virgins, but his breathtaking performance of Bossi's spectacular *Étude symphonique* should be enough to entice even the most jaded of enthusiasts.

Any disc bearing the simple legend 'Bach, Liszt, Widor' has the potential to be a critic's worst nightmare, and I can't be blamed for putting it back to last. Certainly, the Korean organist **Jae-Hyuck Cho** bristles with gushy virtuosity in his high-octane romp through both the ubiquitous Toccata and Fugue in D minor and the equally omnipresent Widor Toccata, but the splendiferous sound exploding from the wonderful organ of La Madeleine in Paris more than compensates for the unadventurous programming; and there is even a new work thrown in for good measure. *Pabdo* by the Korean composer Texu Kim is a bit like Duruflé with oriental infusions, but it toys so happily and effectively with the unique sound of the organ and the church's acoustic that it all seems like a delightful dream. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Synagogue Organ Music
Stephan Lutermann
CPO (C) CPO555 127-2



Prairie Sounds
Maxine Thévenot
Raven (C) OAR162



Green and Pleasant Land, Vol 2
Kevin Bowyer
Priory (C) PRCD1193



Pachelbel Cpte Organ Works, Vol 3
Belotti, Schmitt, Christie
CPO (C) (C) CPO777 558-2



Grier Music for Organ
Tom Winpenny
Willowhayne (C) WHR051



Grandes Orgues 1710
Ton Koopman
Château de Versailles (C) CVS016



European Organ Music
Colin Walsh
Priory (C) PRCD1223



Bach, Liszt, Widor Org Wks
Jae-Hyuck Cho
Evidence (C) EVCD058

10 variations written when he was 18 are not often heard and offer, writes Bianchi, 'an interesting compendium of [his] piano style'; Tausig's solo version of Schubert's *Andantino varié* is another work we should hear more. Bianchi follows this with the much-loved B flat major Impromptu (a theme with five variations) and finishes with the astringent, if tonal, five variations written in 1956 on a theme from Schubert's waltz in C sharp minor, D643, by the German composer Helmut Lachenmann.

Has the piano been captured a bit too far distant from the back of an empty hall? For my taste, yes, but all in all, this is a most satisfying disc both musically and pianistically. **Jeremy Nicholas**

'Versailles'

d'Anglebert Chaconne d'Angelbert. Les folies d'Espagne. Fugue grave **d'Anglebert/Lully** Ouverture de Cadmus. Sarabande **Balbastre** La Suzanne **F Couperin** Les ombres errantes. Passacaille **Duphly** La de Belombre. La Pothuïn **Lully** Marche pour la cérémonie des Turcs **Rameau** Gavotte et Doubles. Les Indes galantes - Viens, Hymen^a. Pièces de clavecin - Prélude; Le rappel des oiseaux; Les sauvages^b; Tambourin **Royer** L'Aimable. La marche des Scythes. Tambourin **Visée** Sarabande **Alexandre Tharaud** *pf* with ^a**Sabine Devieille** *sop* ^b**Justin Taylor** *pf* Erato (C) 9029 53864-2 (78' • DDD)



Alexandre Tharaud loves a themed disc and 'Versailles' is a typically personal exploration of the glories of the French Baroque keyboard tradition. He doesn't let the fact that some of this music is inherently unpianistic get in his way and in the booklet interview points out that he is part of a long line of French pianists borrowing from the harpsichord oeuvre, and rightly pays generous tribute to Marcelle Meyer in particular.

It's a beautifully programmed disc – so much so that it begs to be heard complete. And the sense that he has lived with this music for a long time is abundantly apparent: readers may recall his discs of Rameau and François Couperin from the early 2000s and there's some overlap with this new offering, which makes for fascinating comparisons.

His sense of characterisation and fine detailing is everywhere apparent, be it the treasurable whispered runs in the de Visée Sarabande, the velvety textures

of Duphly's *La Pothouïn* or the daringly dreamy *L'Aimable* by Royer. Even for aficionados of this repertoire there are surprises to be had alongside such favourites as Rameau's *Tambourin* (which never feels straitjacketed by its accentuation as it can do in less imaginative performances).

He can take us to extremes in successive tracks, from the complete inwardness of d'Anglebert's *Dieu des Enfers* Sarabande to Royer's *La marche des Scythes*, in which the piano's inability to create the harpsichord's haze of overtones as it breaks into virtuoso figuration doesn't matter, for Tharaud instead conjures atmosphere through his subtle pedalling and the result is the equal of that wondrous harpsichord recording made by Christophe Rousset back in 1991. Tharaud then springs another surprise, with Rameau's 'Viens, Hymen' from *Les Indes galantes*, for which he is joined by Sabine Devieille, whose supple and light soprano is matched by keyboard-playing of great delicacy. He is also joined by the pianist Justin Taylor for an uproarious four-hand arrangement of Rameau's *Les Sauvages* by Léon Roques, which makes great play of the piece's contrasting registers.

François Couperin's *Les ombres errantes* is another essay in subtlety, though I do wonder if it's just a little too slow compared to his earlier recording, which flows more naturally. On the other hand, the same composer's *Passacaille* is even more striking this time round: here, a slower pace emphasises its grandeur and the sheer novelty of the harmonic pattern on which it is built. The intensity continues through the d'Anglebert organ Fugue, with Duphly's *La de Belombre* delightfully puncturing the sombre mood, and sounding positively skittish in Tharaud's hands. Balbastre's *La Suzanne* is another harpsichord showpiece that initially looks very unpromising on the piano but Tharaud, undaunted, brings it gleefully to life, a tour de force of colour and shifting contrasting moods.

Tharaud ends with d'Anglebert's variations on the popular tune *Les folies d'Espagne*, with the composer exploiting its rhythmic possibilities as much as the ornamental and textural ones. It ends a life-affirming disc in suitably upbeat fashion. **Harriet Smith**

Rameau Les Sauvages, Gavotte et Doubles – selected comparison:

Tharaud (5/02) (HARM) HMC90 1754

Couperin Les Ombres errantes, Passacaille;

Duphly La Pothouïn – selected comparison:

Tharaud (6/07) (HARM) HMC90 1956

Tansy Davies

She may be wavering between the urban and the pastoral, but this prolific British composer still has the edge that set her apart almost two decades ago, says **Andrew Mellor**

The trajectory of Tansy Davies's music so far has, to the naked ear, been one of migration from the thrilling grubbiness of the city to the verdant abundance of nature. When she came to prominence in the early 2000s, Davies was the 'urban' composer par excellence – her music all about the back alleys, scraping and slapping, spraying luminous graffiti on dirty brick walls and forcing alien partners into seedy transactional dances.

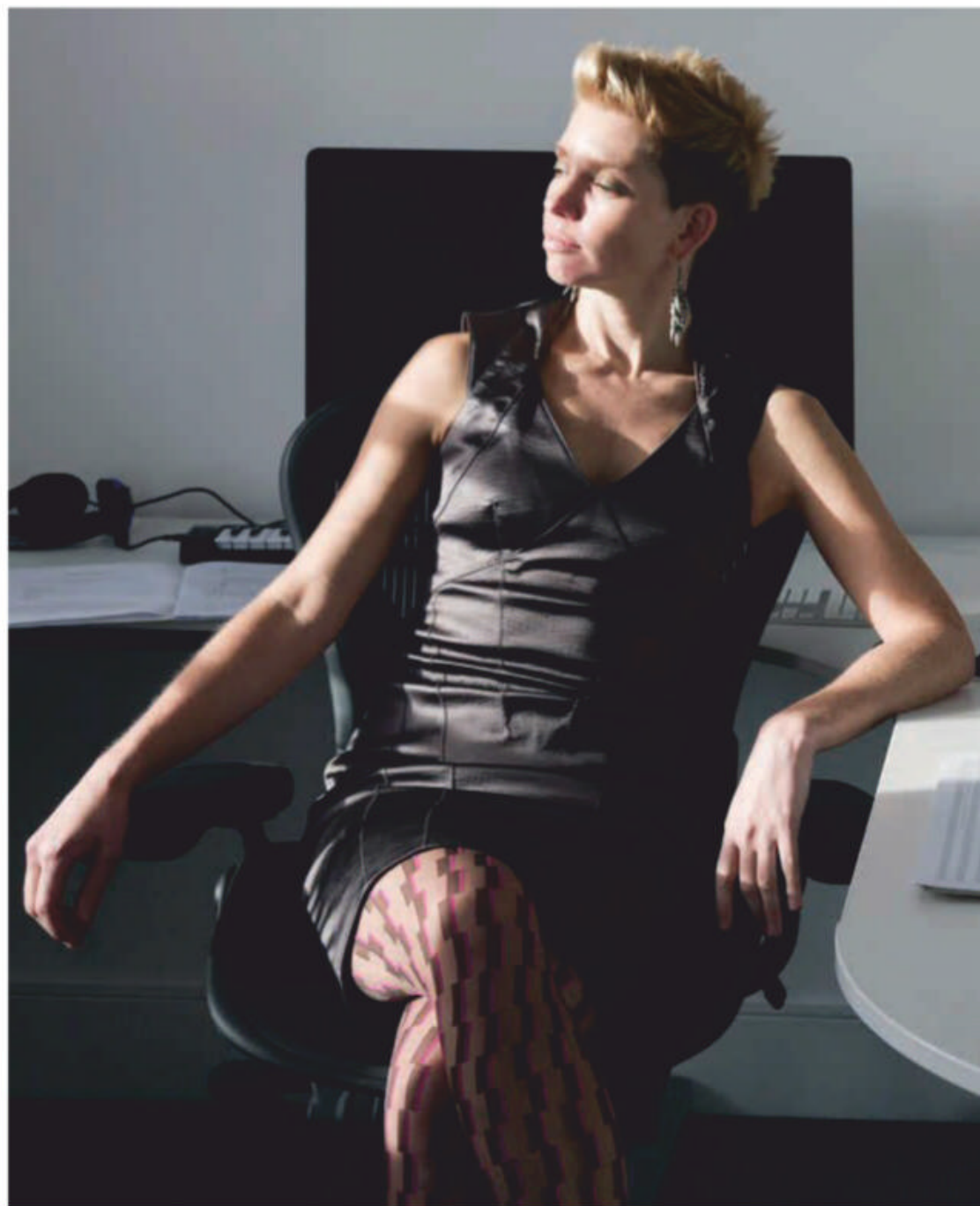
The disciplined mechanics behind these early mature works combined with their confidence, freshness and almost physical sex appeal to make Davies *the* talked about composer in a Britain high on post-millennium optimism. *Neon* (2004) became something of a signature work, its music as lucid and cool as its title. You were easily ensnared by the crackling energy – the sleaze, the funk, the manic melodies and the sudden sprays of primary colours – sprouting out between the cracks in the breeze blocks that made up this imposing, real-life music.

Early on there was already something else afoot – an impulse drawn less from the machine age, more from nature's patterns

There is some Steve Martland in those blazing hues, some Mark-Anthony Turnage in those panicked yet bluesy melodies. But Davies's works from the period, arguably her most distinctive vintage, had a signature of their own. Their gait was funky but didn't throw the sharpest shapes – purposefully wrong-footed by uneven bar lengths, contrived unsteadiness and gently distorting material. *Tilting* (2005), written for the London Symphony Orchestra, gives you all three. Partly inspired by the work of architect Zaha Hadid, it bends a fragment of an old trouvère song into prows and buttresses. Bits of it, surface and underbelly, spin off in their own fragmented geometry.

As in the work of the architect, there is reliable engineering underneath almost all of Davies's music, just as there is in the neatly interlocking boxes of *Neon*. In reference to *Tilting*, the composer likened the music's structure to that of a machine containing a series of cogs; 'I might have two, three or four different-sized musical cogs turning at any moment. Sometimes they meet at a certain point; they might all meet, which means you get a chord.'

You can take the image further with a little help from the orchestral score *Kingpin* (2007), named after the one element of the engine for Henry Ford's Model T that never needed replacing or repairing – in Davies's own words, 'the strong and trustworthy heart' of the machine. In a sense, *Kingpin*



Davies: a composer of real-life music that's 'adapting in tandem with society'

is a working model of her music of the period even if it lacks the distinctive live-wire seasoning of electric components. In *Kingpin*, nothing stays still; time itself is energised forwards as the machine grinds onwards and onwards. It is an attractive metaphor for good musical engineering: the constituent parts of the orchestral machine thrusting, pumping and cranking in their own direction but delivering the single, unison motion the machine is built to deliver.

While *Kingpin* chugs on happily of its own accord, in *Grind Show* (2007) Davies sets up one of her typically taut mechanisms against a secondary element, if not disruptive then certainly provocative. The acoustic revellers of *Grind Show* dance their bawdy dance while electronics show us the damp, malevolent nocturnal landscape outside; the drama takes on a new dimension. In *Salt Box* (2005), electronic elements infiltrate the whole, demarking the space, keeping it cool and dry enough for the decadent little ensemble: a handful of instruments, including a funky Hammond B3, squeezed too close to one another for comfort and engaged in a non-metric dance, their elbows causing all sorts of trouble. It's another piece of *echt* Davies.

What we might take from works like these is an idea of persistence through change, a riding-out of the tension on which the music actually thrives. But even at this stage, there was already something else afoot – an impulse drawn less from the machine age and more from the patterns of nature. *Streamlines* (2006) is inspired by Karl Blossfeldt's close-up photographs of plants, which traced their natural designs



DAVIES FACTS

Born May 29, 1973, Bristol, UK
Studied the horn and composition (with Alan Bullard) at Colchester Institute (1991-94), and composition at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama (1997-98; with Simon Bainbridge) and Royal Holloway, University of London (2000-03; with Simon Holt)
Worked as a freelance horn player for two years between university and postgraduate composition studies, mostly working in London's West End
Most recent work is *Soul Canoe* (2019) for an ensemble of 10 players, the culmination of her time as composer-in-residence at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam; the title refers to the soul canoe or *wuramon*, made by the Asmat tribe of the Indonesian province of West Papua

and growth patterns. The score borrows the structure of 'nodes' – the junctions of a plant's physical anatomy – to instigate sudden, streamlined spurts of activity which spiral towards their natural end points.

So even in 2006, Davies's musical fragments could become natural – her cogs more like cells or organisms. 'I feel very strongly that we need to get out of the human condition and appreciate the thrilling mechanisms of nature,' she said as far back as 2001, at the height of her reputation for urban grit. The continual reshaping and superimposition of those musical fragments was adapting in tandem with society, away from dirty, oily mechanics and towards the green and organic.

Recent orchestral works have borne out that idea. The composer's concerto for four horns, *Forest* (2016; not only written by a composer who was formerly a horn player, but also dedicated to one: Esa-Pekka Salonen), concerns itself with 'finding a way of listening to the world around us; to a forest imagined in music, to hear what it might have to say about our current predicament as humans in a dramatically changing environment'. Her solo horns sound even more human than the sexy, dancing creatures of *Neon*. Before *Forest* came a work for conductorless orchestra, *Re-Greening* (2015), an explosion of greenness and fertility with a gentle, spiritual side and a fearlessness in the face of the sprawling, chaotic forest. It feels like a world away from the taut, delimited spaces and hot-hoofed trot of Davies in 2000s vintage, even if plenty of signature gestures remain (spurts of colour among them).

The more easy lyricism of *Re-Greening* wasn't entirely new and has continued to evolve. The piece followed Davies's operatic meditation on September 11, *Between Worlds* (2014), arguably unsuccessful as a theatre piece but certainly not as a work of poetic fantasy that meets the lyricism of the human

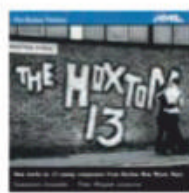
voice with its own. Its operatic successor, on a far smaller scale, was a more solid work precisely because of its flexibility. *Cave* (2018), a chamber opera on grief and the search for reassurance, took Davies from the dangerously literal territory of the shiny skyscraper back to the urban hinterland she so comfortably occupied before, and from which the emotional base of the vocal writing felt more able to blossom naturally.

Nick Drake was the librettist for both operas, and you hear just how naturally the composer responds to his poetry in *This Love* (2009), a tender song for tenor that lays an absolutely 'straight' melody over a highly refracted, distantly sympathetic piano accompaniment. That little song has always felt like a fertile piece that might bear more significance than is first obvious – a new variant on the various two-part inventions that have threaded their way through the composer's career (the best of them found in *Loopholes and Lynchpins*, 2003).

The duality is extended in *Antenoux* (2017) for ensemble, in which fluttering woodwind and lyrical strings try to conjure up a pastoral in the face of rigid shapes and structures – to convert a disciplined tapestry into something that's not a tapestry at all but altogether freer, breezier. They have a job on their hands, given the strength of the elements they're trying to thwart: a passacaglia on our old friend a funky slap bass with another electric guitar for company. It feels like the good old days of 2004 all over again. Perhaps Davies just can't shake off the buzz of the city. **G**

CHAMBER-SCALE WORKS ON DISC

Featuring urban beginnings and two all-Davies releases

**Patterning**

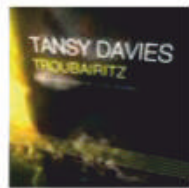
Composers Ensemble / Peter Wiegold
 NMC (1/02)

Davies was adopted early by the Composers Ensemble, and her relatively early score *Patterning* (2000) is revealing – structured initially as a two-part invention based on the idea of a single line played at two speeds. The combination induces both frenetic movement and calming stasis, a process that would be developed in later works. There are 12 other interesting composers for company on this well-played snapshot of the 'Hoxton 13'.

**'Spine'**

BCMG; Azalea; Concordia / Christopher Austin
 NMC (11/12)

There are plenty of gems among the heartfelt performances on this all-Davies disc: the manic, grooving energy of the petite saxophone concerto *Iris* (2004), the exhaling and capering *Spine* (2005), the above-mentioned *Loopholes and Lynchpins* and *This Love*, and the riotous yet tender tapestry of textures that is *Falling Angel* (2006).

**'Troubairitz'**

Anna Snow voc Azalea / Christopher Austin
 Nonclassical (7/11)

Here is a mature performance of *Neon* that enjoys the distinctive shuffling groove of the work and its menagerie of slapping, scraping, grinding and thwacking, but which views them in context at the same time. The many more beguiling works on this recording include *Salt Box*, *Greenhouses* (2011) and 'What I Write Now' (from the 2010 song-cycle *Troubairitz*). This is the essential all-Davies album, but after this and 'Spine' (above), it's about time we had a record of her larger orchestral works.

Vocal



Tim Ashley hears American and British songs from Adèle Charvet: *'Charvet has a warm, appealing mezzo, with a tangy lower register and fine dynamic control at the top'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**



Edward Breen welcomes an album of rarities written for Milan Cathedral: *'The smooth, honeyed sound of Siglo de Oro is largely due to the soft and clear sheen of their radiant sopranos'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 81**

JS Bach • Kuhnau • Schelle

'Magnificat - Christmas in Leipzig'

JS Bach Magnificat, BWV243a **Kuhnau**

Magnificat **Schelle** Machet die Tore weit

Solomon's Knot

Sony Classical © 19075 99262-2 (75' • DDD • T/t)



On their much-anticipated debut recording, Solomon's Knot offer, in

chronological order, works from three successive Thomaskantors: Johann Schelle (1648-1701), Johann Kuhnau (1660-1722) and Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). The programme is built around Bach's first *Magnificat*, the work in E flat, BWV243a, and his likely model, the rather splendid C major *Magnificat* by his predecessor, Kuhnau; both are presented with interpolated chorales. These are introduced by Schelle's sprightly *Machet die Tore weit* ('Lift up your heads, O ye gates'). Solomon's Knot perform without conductor, from memory and on period instruments (joint artistic directors are James Halliday and Jonathan Sells), hence their preferred description as a 'collective'; and in order to capture this spirit, this album was made in a live performance at Milton Court concert hall with limited editing.

The singers take an extrovert, expressive approach to text that communicates best in festive choral sections. The opening of Kuhnau's *Magnificat* shows them at the height of their powers: bright, powerful and more muscular than Bach Collegium Japan (BIS, 10/99). The instrumentalists are similarly superb, with a blazingly joyful tone in the brass and superbly tight phrasing from oboes and violins. The standout solos are impressive throughout, both from singers and instrumentalists. Just occasionally, however, eagerness tips into giddiness: Clare Lloyd-Griffiths's otherwise impressive solo 'Et exsultavit spiritus meus' would benefit from a less frenetic approach to its angular opening phrase; her pace is set puppyishly fast by

the instrumentalists and takes a moment to find the grace that characterises its latter half. Leo Duarte's oboe-playing is sumptuous, both in tone and phrasing.

Bach's *Magnificat* is exciting and immediate throughout. Amy Carson's 'Et exsultavit spiritus meus' is particularly delightful, as is the unaccompanied interpolation 'Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her'. Alex Ashworth's 'Quia fecit mihi magna' steals the show: if one could bottle gravitas, this would be it. The throbbing passion of the duet 'Et misericordia', which James Halliday notes as a potential prefiguration of the opening movement of the *St Matthew Passion*, is suitably beguiling. Overall this is a joyful disc and an impressive debut but, on CD at least, I feel the more tranquil movements lack finesse. **Edward Breen**

Berg • Mahler • Samuel

'Clytemnestra'

Berg Altenberg Lieder, Op 4 **Mahler**

Rückert Lieder **Samuel** Clytemnestra

Ruby Hughes sop **BBC National**

Orchestra of Wales / Jac van Steen

BIS © BIS2408 (55' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



The ghost of Richard Strauss's Klytemnestra in *Elektra* hovers over

the final work on the soprano Ruby Hughes's new BIS album. Strauss and Hofmannsthal's vivid, grotesque creation (after Sophocles) is close in date, too, to Hughes's couplings. The Clytemnestra she presents, however, is that created by Welsh composer Rhian Samuel, setting texts drawn from translations from Aeschylus.

Composed in 1994 for Della Jones, it's a powerful and persuasive 25-minute monodrama (it would make a potent if draining paring with Schoenberg's *Erwartung*) whose seven movements take us from the first news of Agamemnon's return, through his murder (the orchestra-only 'The Deed') to 'Confession', 'Defiance' and

'Epilogue: Dirge', whose sudden quiet reflectiveness is surprisingly moving.

Samuel's musical language is accessible and powerful, with an appropriately craggy granitic strength to it, although the addition of bass guitar in 'The Deed' feels a little arbitrary in a work that's otherwise quite conventionally scored. If we don't always get a sense of this Clytemnestra's own musical character, that might be deliberate, a reflection of her own negotiation with her deed and its motivation. Jac van Steen gets excellent, vivid playing from the BBC National Orchestra of Wales but it's Hughes's performance that carries the whole enterprise: vivid, powerful and superbly committed, bringing a real complexity and vulnerability to the character.

She's impressive in the couplings, too, using her lightish soprano intelligently in a sharply etched account of Mahler's *Rückert Lieder* (with an especially fine 'Um Mitternacht') and a focused, uncompromising account of Berg's *Altenberg Lieder* – both well accompanied. But it's for Samuel's punchy work that this fine album is primarily worth seeking out.

Hugo Shirley

Berlioz

Messe solennelle

Adriana Gonzalez sop **Julian Behr** ten **Andreas**

Wolf bass **Le Concert Spirituel / Hervé Niquet**

Alpha © ALPHA564 (51' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Chapelle Royale, Versailles, June 2019



It's nearly 30 years now since John Warrack, in these pages, hailed the sudden rediscovery of a copy of this Mass (in Antwerp) as 'the most exciting musical discovery of modern times'. He was also greeting the work's first recording under John Eliot Gardiner, the first – as it has turned out to date – of three. In a passionate booklet note Hervé Niquet



Solomon's Knot's recording debut presents Leipzig Magnificats by Bach and Kuhnau, performed with expressive immediacy and excitement

sounds scarcely able to contain his impatience before being able to record this new performance, also captured live.

Le Concert Spirituel's version is both quicker and smoother than Gardiner's. While not avoiding any of the daring harmonic clashes that must have pinned back ears in the 1820s, it enjoys them rather less than Gardiner. The effect is more intimate and chapel-like. The choir are courageous, especially the sopranos. Berlioz may have been totally untrained musically – as Niquet loved to point out in his promotional puffs for the work – but he surely had Beethoven's later choral work in his ears while writing. These singers are worked hard.

The effect is to emphasise even more what a daring work this was for its time. What we now hear as radical use of blocks of sound and mood – try the 'Resurrexit' (only one version here, unlike Gardiner), which gets almost operetta-like in its celebration of Christ's return to life – may actually have embarrassed Berlioz into feeling he didn't know enough yet and encouraged the work's premature withdrawal. This young composer, given a slot to occupy, certainly had a go at displaying all his craft at once ...

The recording is more than clear enough in sound and balance to do justice to the performance, although a strange mangling of Latin pronunciation comes over tenor

and choir in the final movements, both the words 'Agnus' and 'Sanctus' proving problematic. Overall it's a stirring occasion and Niquet's passion is clearly realised – but as a straight choice I'd still take the Gardiner for its characteristically manic energy and enjoyment of orchestral detail. **Mike Ashman**

Selected comparison:

Gardiner (4/94^R) (DECC) 483 4687DM9

Eötvös

Halleluja - Oratorium balbulum^a.

Alle vittime senza nome^b

^a*Iris Vermillion* *mez* ^a*Topi Lehtipuu* *ten*

^a*Matthias Brandt* *narr* ^a*WDR Radio Chorus and Symphony Orchestra / Peter Eötvös*; ^b*Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Rome / Sir Antonio Pappano*

Wergo © WER7386-2 (75' • DDD)

Recorded live at the ^aPhilharmonie, Cologne, April 28 & 29, 2017; ^bSanta Cecilia Hall, Auditorium Parco della Musica, Rome, October 14, 2017



Peter Eötvös's *Halleluja* (2015) is styled 'oratorium balbulum' – a

stammering oratorio – and subtitled 'Four Fragments'. The latter does not indicate sections of a larger work, but rather that the whole is not a conventional choral-and-orchestral work with a linear narrative.

This is apparent from the outset, with the choir's opening, unresolved question 'Who are we?' and the at times sideways pronouncements of the narrator, deliciously delivered by Matthias Brandt, who makes it very clear that he is the narrator.

Halleluja – oratorium balbulum is, then, at least partially a composition about itself, about the relationship of words and music, and to silence. The 'choir represents a society that says "hallelujah" to everything', Eötvös has stated, while the stammering of them and the soloists derives from the late 9th/early 10th-century Benedictine monk Notker the Stammerer (aka Notker Balbulus), whose liturgical sequences made him an important figure in musical development. It is impossible to say more as, maddeningly, Wergo does not provide the libretto written jointly by Eötvös and the late Péter Esterházy.

Nonetheless, it is not difficult to appreciate the quality of the musical setting, nor the splendid live performance captured in Cologne in 2017. The performers sound at one in their presentation, whether in the hushed choral comments or the chiming percussion that dominates some sections. The whole is more than the sum of its fragments, compelling and involving, as is the purely orchestral companion, *Alla vittime senza nome* ('To the nameless victims', 2016), a three-movement

threnody to the countless masses of African and Middle Eastern people dying in waves seeking refuge in Europe. Whether due to the urgency of Eötvös's expressive intent, his attaining ever greater compositional refinement or the more approachable idiom, *Alla vittime* is the most affecting and impressive work of his that I have heard. It is brilliantly rendered here by Pappano and the Santa Cecilia Orchestra. Very strongly recommended. **Guy Rickards**

Handel • Haydn • A Scarlatti

'Arianna'

Handel Ah! crudel, nel pianto mio, HWV78

Haydn Arianna a Naxos, HobXXVlb:2

A Scarlatti L'Arianna (Ebra d'amor fuggia), H242

Kate Lindsey *mez* **Arcangelo** / **Jonathan Cohen**

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA576 (72' • DDD • T/t)



Kate Lindsey's second solo album, like her first (9/17), takes her away from the classic

lyric repertoire with which she has been making her name on stage and into the Baroque – a field she has only really entered so far as Nerone in Monteverdi's *Poppea* for Christie in Salzburg in 2018 and, this very month, the same character in Handel's *Agrippina* in New York. It looks like the idea of a single character seen through different eyes appeals to her, for here she brings together three cantatas dealing with the abandonment of Ariadne by Thetis on the island of Naxos, the thanks she got for helping him slay the Minotaur and giving him all her loving. Perhaps Lindsey got the idea during her numerous appearances as the Composer in Strauss's opera.

Whatever the case, her strong and assured voice slips easily into this music. While she offers up a little more vibrato than some baroque singers might, beauty and clarity of line are certainly not affected, and throughout she shows impressive technical control and agility. More strikingly, though, she brings her stage experience to bear in dramatic readings whose intelligent responses to the differing nuances of these three pieces are what really make the project spark. For the Scarlatti – which, unusually, begins before Thetis has quit the scene and ends with Ariadne being assumed into the heavens – the mood is dreamy and erotic; Lindsey sings here with delicious intimacy, at times as if she were whispering into our ears. In Handel's superb piece, which starts at the 'crudel!' stage, her voice hardens and darkens, before lightening up at the end

when Ariadne decides that by continuing to love Thetis she will bring him back. Poor deluded thing. Then in the more fluidly emotional music of the Haydn Lindsey brings out the Mozartian mix of subtle emotion and musical poise – how love-drowsy she sounds at her first entry!

The playing of Arcangelo under Jonathan Cohen is typically high-quality, and often heartbreakingly attendant to the drama. This is a lovely programme, expertly performed and full of touching feeling and imagination. **Lindsay Kemp**

R Harvey

'Evensong'

The Altar. The Call. Credo. Dona nobis pacem.

Et in Arcadia. Evensong. Lullay. Night Song.

A Prayer. Sanctus

Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir /

Heli Jürgenson

Altus Ⓢ ALU0018 (50' • DDD)



Richard Harvey's album 'Kyrie' (2017) saw the film composer rework

and rearrange several themes and cues into a choral context. In 'Evensong', however, the focus on film is less pronounced, the musical setting more devotional, the expression more personal.

One need look no further than the opening track, *A Prayer* – voices softly pulsing like flickering lights before transforming into a glowing, hymnlike statement at the end. Darker uncertainties creep into Harvey's other setting on the disc of the 19th-century Canadian poet Archibald Lampman. *Night Song* features ominous rising vocal lines in bare octaves against spidery ostinatos on harp, deftly played by Liis Viira; while Harvey's choice of two George Herbert poems in the folk-like *The Call* and *The Altar* point to the composer's Welsh roots.

The devotional ambience on 'Evensong' is sensed most prominently in the two Mass settings, *Sanctus* and *Credo*, with the former benefiting from the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir's luminous sound and aided by the resonant acoustic of St Nicholas Church in Tallinn. Harvey's film credentials occasionally rise to the surface, too, such as in the haunting, soundtrack-like *Et in Arcadia*, where voices and percussion blend to create Foley-like effects. The album's best moments are heard when the music dictates the nature of the material rather than the other way around, such as in the straight-shooting,

Dowlandesque *Lullay*. In this sense, the title-track, featuring a rather odd assortment of voices and instruments (organ, harp, oboe, cor anglais, recorder, pan flute and the zither-like psaltery) does rather flatter to deceive. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

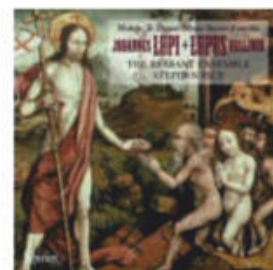
Hellinck • Lupi

Hellinck *Missa Surrexit pastor bonus* **Lupi**

Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel. Quam pulchra es. Salve celeberrima virgo. Te Deum laudamus

The Brabant Ensemble / **Stephen Rice**

Hyperion Ⓢ CDA68304 (71' • DDD • T/t)



Forget the glamour of Hollywood's Rat Pack, the 16th century had a Wolf Pack of

musicians whose names derive from the Latin *lupus*. The two composers on this disc may not be the best known but their music can be as suave and smooth as anything sung by 'Ol' Blue Eyes' himself.

Lupus Hellinck's (1493/94-1541) five-voice *Missa Surrexit pastor bonus* is based on a motet by Andreas de Silva (fl1520s). The textures are bright and spacious, with delightful trio and duet sections punctuating the movements. This pairing of upper voices suits the generally bright and perky performance style of The Brabant Ensemble and I also admire the pacing: erring towards brisk, the proportions of the movements are clear and the false relations cheekily piquant. Yet, as ever, I would prefer more shapely, indulgent phrasing; the *Kyrie* in particular is quite careful, the wide opening intervals suggesting to me a sense of expansion that this performance never quite delivers. Similarly, in the *Gloria* I would enjoy more overt dynamic contrasts: 'Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te' feels slightly efficient considering the rich harmonic framework of this Mass. However, this is but a brief distraction since moments of sheer beauty also abound, such as the trio beginning 'Domine Deus, Agnus Dei', with its delicate cadence on 'filius patris' infused with The Brabant Ensemble's superbly citrusy tuning. There is also a very accomplished duet 'Et resurrexit tertia die', beautifully balanced and controlled.

The real highlight of this disc is Johannes Lupi's (c1506-1539) Marian motet *Salve celeberrima virgo*: a rich, velvety texture thrillingly permeated with the spirit of Gombert, and sporting a cadence at 'et quam decora' that is near-identical to the first part of *Lugebat David Absalon*. Lupi again catches the ear with his motet *Quam pulchra es* via an extraordinary cadenza-like



Delicious intimacy: Kate Lindsey brings emotion and poise to the music of Handel, Haydn and Alessandro Scarlatti, superbly accompanied by Arcangelo

passage on the final Amen. As ever with Stephen Rice's programmes, this album contains many enjoyable discoveries presented with a clean, bright sound that's unrelentingly attractive and impressive.

Edward Breen

Karlsons

Adoratio^a. Le lagrime dell'anima

Ora pro nobis. Oremus ...

Latvian Radio Choir; ^aSinfonietta Riga /

Sigvards Kljava

Ondine © ODE1342-2 (66' • DDD • T/t)



Juris Karlsons is one of Latvia's most distinguished composers, with an extensive output and having occupied some of the highest positions in his native country's musical world, but his work is curiously relatively little known abroad in comparison with a number of younger Latvian composers.

Karlsons's texts tend to be taken from various places, which encourages the variety one hears in his approach to choral textures – not for him the stretched-out 'single effect' approach of so much contemporary choral music. This does not mean that he is incapable or unwilling to

make use of great washes of sound, however, as one may hear in the latter part of *Oremus* ... (2018). The gentle, tinkling atmosphere of *Adoratio* (2010), subtitled 'Symphony', is initially summoned by orchestra rather than choir, but the voices are essential in structural terms to the work. It cannot be described simply as a 'setting' of the words (a compilation in Latin that is essentially an invocation of the Trinity); when the choir enters in the first of its four movements, it is as an integral part of a sound world made up of both instruments and voices. The second movement makes use of choral speaking, which I confess to finding the least effective element in the work, but it is replaced in short order by a return to sung invocation. The third movement will probably surprise the listener most, evocative as it is of what one might call the late Soviet symphonic tradition.

If *Adoratio* is really not the sum of its parts, *Le lagrime dell'anima* ... (2013) is more consistent, working towards a great choral climax at just after the halfway point before returning to a calmer atmosphere. The most recent piece on the disc is the last, *Ora pro nobis* (2019), another compilation of Latin texts that receives a truly outstanding rendition from the Latvian Radio Choir. Recording quality is, as always from Ondine, outstanding. **Ivan Moody**

Liszt

'The Complete Songs, Vol 6'

Comment, disaient-ils, S276 (second version).

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leise, mein Lied, S301 (second version). Lieder

aus Schillers Wilhelm Tell, S292 (second

version). Die Loreley, S273 (first version).

Die Macht der Musik, S302 (second version).

Mignons Lied, S275 (first version). Oh! quand je

dors, S282 (second version). Quand tu chantes,

bercée, S306a. Schwebe, schwebe, blaues Auge,

S305 (first version). S'il est un charmant gazon,

S284 (second version). Wo weilt er?, S295

(second version). Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth,

S274 (first version)

Julia Kleiter *sop* **Julius Drake** *pf*

Hyperion © CDA68235 (61' • DDD • T/t)



The German soprano Julia Kleiter joins Julius Drake for the sixth volume of

Hyperion's Liszt survey, which covers the years 1841 to 1859, a period that saw Liszt abandon his career as a concert virtuoso in order to concentrate on composition and take up his position as Kapellmeister in Weimar, where he was to remain until 1861. Many of the songs here have an almost operatic intensity and weight, a reminder, perhaps, that Liszt was also

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contemporaneously working on his eventually abandoned opera *Sardanapalo*, which occupied him intermittently for almost a decade from 1842. Now that we have Kirill Karabits's recording of David Trippett's reconstruction of *Sardanapalo*'s first act (Audite, 2/19), we're perhaps in a better position to understand the relationship between opera and song in Liszt's imagination.

Many of Liszt's early songs were geared to salon performance by the major singers of his day. The first 'Loreley', 'Mignons Lied' and 'Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth' (1841, 1842 and 1843 respectively) are in essence dramatic monologues, while 'Die Macht der Musik', from 1848, is effectively a cantata for voice and piano, cast along the lines of an operatic scena, with an introductory recitative followed by a long *bel canto* melody that invites comparison with the aria that Liszt provided for his heroine Mirra in *Sardanapalo*'s first scene. In later revisions and recompositions, he tended to tone the innate theatricality down. Kleiter and Drake give us the second versions, dating from 1859, of both the Hugo settings and the *Lieder aus Schillers Wilhelm Tell*: while the former remain innately operatic – 'Oh! quand je dors' is grandly ecstatic – the Schiller settings, revised, one suspects, to emphasise their textual emphasis on transience, are altogether more muted than the rapturous originals, unforgettably recorded by Matthew Polenzani on the first disc of the series (1/11).

The performances here blaze with conviction. Kleiter's tone is wonderfully even and exceptionally beautiful over a wide vocal range, and her commitment is never for a second in doubt. Mignon's anguish is vividly realised as Liszt tellingly blurs the distinctions between the lover, protector and father to whom the song is addressed and Drake whips up a veritable storm at the mention of 'der Drachen alte Brut' that tips the music towards nightmare. Kleiter unleashes a glorious flood of sound at the climactic invocation of 'Musik, du Mächtige' in 'Die Macht der Musik', but she's also capable of ravishing *pianissimos* in the exquisite 'Kling leise, mein Lied' and at the close of 'Oh! quand je dors', where the final phrase drifts wistfully upwards to its final silence. Drake is similarly at his best here, providing darkness as well as wit in 'Enfant, si j'étais roi' and a real display of virtuosity, drama and colour as the boat sinks in 'Die Loreley'. A marvellous disc and a great recital in its own right, this is arguably the finest instalment of the series to date. Do listen to it. **Tim Ashley**

Mahler · JS Bach

'Kathleen Ferrier in New York'

JS Bach Ach, dass nicht die letzte Stunde, BWV439^a. Bist du bei mir, BWV508^a. Vergiss mein nicht, BWV505^a **Mahler** Das Lied von der Erde^b

Kathleen Ferrier *contr*^b **Set Svanholm** *ten*

^a**John Newmark** *pf*^b **New York Philharmonic Orchestra / Bruno Walter**

Somm Ariadne © ARIADNE5007 (78' • AAD • T/t)

Recorded live at ^bCarnegie Hall, New York, January 18, 1948; ^aTown Hall, New York, January 8, 1950. Includes 1956 interview with Bruno Walter



A treasure, to be sure. Four years before Bruno Walter's celebrated, indeed

classic Vienna recording (1952) with Kathleen Ferrier, the man who conducted the world premiere of Mahler's pantheistic symphony with voices takes his newest discovery from the Edinburgh Festival to America, there to share her extraordinary kinship with the piece at New York's Carnegie Hall. There were three performances. This was the third of them.

And let me say straight away that, while Ferrier was by her own account fighting a cold at the time, this performance for me gives a far clearer sense of why Walter felt he had found the ideal singer for the piece than his later Vienna recording. He speaks very movingly about his first meeting with Ferrier in a couple of priceless audio interview snippets included on the disc. He recalls how he had hitherto decided that he would only conduct the piece again if he found the right singer and that hearing the unique Ferrier sound for the first time was one of the great revelations of his life. A bold statement – but then Walter knew better than most that the plangency of that sound with its affecting flutter of vibrato would illuminate both the letter and the spirit of Mahler's score in ways that even the composer might not have imagined.

Ferrier's shadings in 'Der Einsame im Herbst' bring with them a new depth of expression. The *pianissimos* are more intense than in the later Vienna recording – 'Mein Herz ist müde' ('My heart is weary') is as inward as the later climax at 'Sonne der Liebe' ('Sun of love') is impassioned. But it is the colour of the voice and the way it resonates in and around Mahler's orchestra that is so spellbinding. In the final setting, 'Der Abschied' – a movement which brought us such a new and timeless soundscape – the solitary nature of Ferrier's timbre makes lines such as 'I am seeking rest for my lonely heart' all the more poignant.

The other voice in this live performance is that of the Swedish Heldentenor Set Svanholm – a hefty presence, for sure, in this most treacherous of songs and ideally suited to the opening heroics, even if some of the shorter grace notes get smudged in the process. But I love the way his vision of the firmament at the heart of the first song is intensified by the 'covered' sound; and while he is perhaps lacking a lighter touch in the later settings, he is not without subtlety compared to what often passes for singing in this music.

Walter for his part owns the pacing and phrasing of the work – as well he might – and marries space and timelessness to an impassioned urgency. The orchestral detail is remarkable given the source of 78rpm acetate transcription discs – and the remastering has preserved a surprising degree of transparency in what one might call the exotic embroidery of the scoring. The great orchestral processional at the heart of the final movement begins with a supernatural shudder of string basses that still conveys some sense of what it must have sounded like in the hall.

The three Bach additions culminate in 'Bist du bei mir' which, given Ferrier's cruelly premature demise, lingers as long in the memory as the final repetitions 'Ewig ... ewig ...' – for ever ... and ever.

Edward Seckerson

Pettersson

Vox humana^a. Six Songs (arr Staffan Storm)^b

^a**Kristina Hellgren** *sop* ^a**Anna Grevelius** *contr*

^a**Conny Thimander** *ten* ^{ab}**Jakob Högström** *bar*

^a**Ensemble SYD; Musica Vitae / Daniel Hansson**
CPO © CPO999 286-2 (69' • DDD • T/t)



Allan Pettersson's cantata *Vox humana* (1974) was composed in close proximity

to his choral Twelfth Symphony, *De döda på torget*. Both set poems by modern, politically minded Latin American writers, Neruda exclusively in the symphony, a diverse range (including Neruda) in the cantata. Another composer (Britten, for instance, or Henze) might have set the 18 texts as a song-cycle but Pettersson's strong sense of flow melds them into something grander; the varying textures of soloists, chorus – the excellent Ensemble SYD, sometimes accompanied, sometimes *a cappella* – and strings fuse into a cogent larger whole like the instrumental sections of a Pettersson symphony.

Daniel Hansson directs a fine, sensitive performance, bringing out the instrumental

lines and synthesising the whole even more closely than did Stig Westerberg in his pioneering BIS recording. That 1976 performance was released originally on LP in 1981 and still sounds terrific on my copy of the 1994 CD reissue. If anything, Westerberg's instrumental lines are cleaner and his chorus (the Swedish Radio Choir) were on top form. I do prefer Kristina Hellgren as the soprano in Hansson's version, stronger in the higher parts than was Marianne Mellnäs; otherwise there is little to choose between the two sets of performers.

BIS chose Hilding Rosenberg's song-cycle *The Shepherd of Days* as coupling, a piece I would not want to be without. CPO gives us more Pettersson, in Staffan Storm's arrangement for baritone, strings and harp of the six early songs (1935). Storm may sound like a Marvel superhero's alter ego but he is a distinguished composer of chamber, orchestral and electroacoustic music, and a senior lecturer in music theory and composition at Malmö Academy within Lund University. His transcriptions are sensitive and subtle, and beautifully sung by Jakob Högström. **Guy Rickards**

Vox humana – comparative version:

Swedish RSO, Westerberg (BIS) BIS-CD55

Rore

Missa Vivat felix Hercules.

Agimus tibi gratias. Ave regina caelorum.

Da pacem Domine. Labore primus Hercules.

Pater noster. Sub tuum praesidium

Weser-Renaissance Bremen / Manfred Cordes

CPO © CPO777 989-2 (70' • DDD • T/t)



Rore's *Missa Praeter rerum seriem*, which conceals a hidden

tribute to his patron, Ercole II d'Este, has been recorded several times, but so far as I'm aware this is the first outing on CD of the Mass that explicitly names him. Given the quality of its sister work, it is high time it was, and Weser-Renaissance complement it with a generous selection of motets. Several are based on well-known chants, and the *Pater noster* has a nod or two in Josquin's direction (most obviously at the close). Like his madrigals, it is connoisseur's music, and none the worse for it.

Those who recall Weser-Renaissance's very fine forays into Schütz are in for a surprise: for some years they have delved occasionally into Franco-Flemish repertory, with perhaps more mixed results, critically speaking. (Unsurprisingly, the cast of characters has changed a great deal over

25 years.) Here, they opt for adult males, using soloists in the motets and two voices on a part in the Mass. The dark sonority reflects the composer's liking for dense textures; so too does an impassive quality to the performances themselves. The singers shape and phrase their lines sensitively, too (try the opening *Ave regina caelorum*). Yet, somehow, there's an unresolved feeling that is hard to pin down. It may be the recording, which feels a touch distant and emphasises the ensemble's darker hues; or perhaps the matching and blend of voices and intonation, which falls just short of perfection, so that the ensemble fails to ring as sympathetically as it might. Much as repeated listening may confirm these impressions, ultimately the deepened appreciation of the music wins out.

Fabrice Fitch

Schumann • Wagner

Schumann *Dichterliebe*, Op 48.

Sechs Gedichte und Requiem, Op 90

Wagner *Wesendonck Lieder*

Christoph Prégardien *ten* **Michael Gees** *pf*

Challenge Classics © CC72788

(64' • DDD/DSD • T)



It's been 25 years since Christoph Prégardien and Andreas Staier presented *Dichterliebe*

as part of an album dedicated to Heine settings by Schumann, Schubert and Mendelssohn (DHM, 12/94). Now into his sixties, the German tenor returns to the cycle in a fascinating if rather more unexpected coupling, joining the growing ranks of *Männerstimme* tackling Wagner's *Fünf Gedichte für eine Frauenstimme* (aka *Wesendonck Lieder*).

Reviewing that first *Dichterliebe*, Alan Blyth noted its tragic colouring in the way it exposed 'the wounded pain of the protagonist'. And that very much tallies with the new release: this is again a performance that offers something earthier, more tangible than mere Romantic navel-gazing. There's reflection, tenderness and *Innigkeit* aplenty, but also a hint of bitterness, a determination and a strength of character (has 'Ich hab' im Traum geweinet' ever sounded closer to the world of Schubert's 'Doppelgänger'?).

Prégardien's voice is inevitably less fresh and juicy than before, often betraying a little unsteadiness and tightness. He eschews the optional top A in 'Ich grolle nicht', but there's still plenty of sweetness, not to mention impressive power in the lower range. Michael Gees's piano-playing,

too, is superb, finding character and nuance at every turn.

The Op 90 set is similarly enjoyable but here the signs of age in Prégardien's voice bother me a little more, especially in a moving but strained account of the 'Requiem'. There are signs of strain, too, in the Wagner, and I'm yet to be persuaded of the suitability of the tenor voice for Wagner's floating lines. Nevertheless, there's much to like in hearing such artistry applied to these songs in their intimate, pared-down form, making it a moving, worthwhile coupling for a compelling *Dichterliebe*.

The engineering is excellent but there's some carelessness in Challenge Classics' booklet (and texts in German only). Another fine release from this superb singer. **Hugo Shirley**

Vivaldi

Juditha triumphans, RV644

Lucía Martín-Cartón, Rachel Redmond *sops*

Marianne Beate Kielland, Marina De Liso, Kristin

Mulders *mezs* **La Capella Reial de Catalunya;**

Le Concert des Nations / Jordi Savall

Alia Vox © AVSA9935 (139' • DDD/DSD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Grande Salle Pierre Boulez, Philharmonie de Paris, October 15, 2018



The ostentatious musical charms and theatricality of *Juditha triumphans devicta*

Holofernes barbarie (1716) are served vividly in this live concert recording made at the Philharmonie de Paris by Le Concert des Nations, who evidently had a field day bringing Vivaldi's colourful instrumentation to life. Jordi Savall opts for a makeshift overture comprising an *Andante – Allegro* from RV562 that features rapier-like concertante violin with swashbuckling trumpets and punchy timpani before a *Largo* from *L'estro armonico* No 9 (RV230) bridges the gap into the bellicose opening chorus.

La Capella Reial de Catalunya's dozen all-female voices transpose the tenor and bass parts up an octave, as might have been customary practice at the Ospedale della Pietà (the sticking point among musicologists is whether or not some ladies could have sung their choir parts at notated pitch). The only other recording to use an all-female choir is De Marchi's abrasive account; Savall's assertive Catalans sing with greater finesse and composure, singing dulcetly as Assyrians in praise of Judith's beauty and as Judean maidens praying for deliverance (placed in the distance as if

their voices are heard on the breeze). The final brassy chorus of triumph has plenty of gutsiness without losing a sense of shape and poise.

Marianne Beate Kielland sings with mellow beauty in Judith's supplication for Bethulia to receive mercy ('Quanto magis generosa', hushed rapture shared between muted strings and solo viola d'amore played by Manfredo Kraemer); she displays bravura intensity (the turbulent 'Agitata infido flatu') and yet elsewhere her voice has breathtaking delicacy when alluding to a turtle dove's marital fidelity in partnership with Lorenzo Coppola's soft chalumeau ('Veni, veni, me sequere fida'), expositing the transience of mortal passions in cahoots with Rolf Lislevand's mandolin ('Transit aetas'), and lulling her drunken enemy to sleep in a lullaby with muted strings ('Vivat in pace'). The moment when Judith prays for courage to decapitate the Assyrian general is accompanied solemnly by five-part violas da gamba (including Savall), violone and two theorbos.

Marina De Liso has a fruitier timbre as the lovelorn victim Holofernes: his comparison at dusk of Judith's beauty to the dawn ('Nox obscura tenebrosa') has silky string-playing, and De Liso's seductive whispering forms an entrancing dialogue with oboist Paolo Grazzi and organist Guido Morini ('Noli, o cara, te adorantis'). Rachel Redmond's sparkling soprano has graceful nonchalance when Vagaus summons a chorus of servants to prepare a banquet ('O servi volate', accompanied extraordinarily by four theorbos), lightly sensual radiance when calling for zephyrs to breathe gently on his sleeping master ('Umbrae carae, aurae adorate', with a pair of pastoral recorders), and astonished horror and ferocious coloratura when invoking the vengeance of the Furies upon discovering Holofernes' corpse ('Armatae face, et anguibus'). Lucía Martín-Cartón's bright-toned Abra (Judith's servant and accomplice) has several lovely continuo arias, and Kristin Mulders conveys Ozias's two arias with an authoritative swagger.

Savall's direction has pacy dramatic momentum while allowing each number to breathe and speak for itself articulately. The addition of clattering tambourine to the drinking song of dissolute Assyrian soldiers is a rare misstep that detracts from Vivaldi's two clarinets, but otherwise there is a synthesis of flair and subtlety that yields a gripping performance of Vivaldi's only extant oratorio. **David Vickers**

Selected comparison:

Academia Montis Regalis, De Marchi

(A/01) (NAIV) OP30314

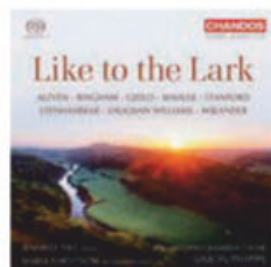
'Like to the Lark'

Alfvén In our meadow. Limu, limu, lima
Bingham The Drowned Lovers^a **Mahler** Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen **Gjeilo** Serenity (O magnum mysterium)^b **Stanford** The Blue Bird, Op 119 No 3 **Stenhammar** Three Choral Songs **Vaughan Williams** The Lark Ascending (arr Drayton)^b. Rest. Three Shakespeare Songs **Wikander** King Lily of the Valley

^aMaria Forsström *mez* ^bJennifer Pike *vn*

The Swedish Chamber Choir / Simon Phipps

Chandos Ⓢ CHSA5255 (64' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



This is a highly attractive and innovative programme of a *cappella* choral

music which also makes use of solo instruments. The Swedish Chamber Choir, a beautifully honed sound with a versatile tessitura (and excellent English!), are directed by Simon Phipps, who brings a sympathetic set of interpretations to much of this inwardly melancholy repertoire. There is a clean edge to the choir's intonation which lends itself to the meditative hues of Vaughan Williams's early *Rest*, the more experimental *Three Shakespeare Songs* of 1951 (especially the sonorous 'The cloud-capp'd towers' with its sinister ending), Stanford's immutable *The Blue Bird* and Judith Bingham's menacing *The Drowned Lovers* (with its Stanford paraphrases). This British repertoire sits well with the appealing Swedish repertoire of Stenhammar's *Three Choral Songs* (which are important settings of Jacobsen – the second is worth comparing with Delius's solo setting of 1896), Alfvén's two folk-song arrangements of 1923 and Wikander's *Kung Liljekonvalje* of 1919, all of which deserve to be better known and more widely sung.

The centrepiece of the recording (from which it evidently takes its name) is the arrangement by Paul Drayton of Vaughan Williams's *The Lark Ascending* for violin and chamber choir. At first I had my doubts about whether such an arrangement could work, since there are numerous features of Vaughan Williams's score – certain orchestral sonorities, long sustained chords (such as the one which accompanies the first violin cadenza), and some tricky passagework – yet these are excellently negotiated to support Jennifer Pike's perceptive reading of the solo violin part in what is a surprisingly convincing and warm representation of the work. I also much enjoyed the Nordic postlude of Gjeilo's *Serenity* (a setting of the well-known Christmas text 'O magnum mysterium')

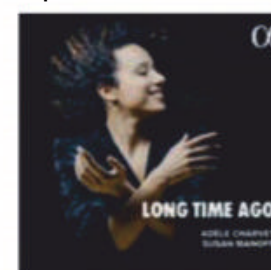
with its numinous counterpoint for the violin, and the velvet tone of Maria Forsström in Gottwald's 16-voice arrangement of Mahler's valedictory 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen'. Again, the control, balance and intonation of the choir in this slow-moving harmonic world is admirable and makes one hope that Phipps and the SCC will do more of this rewarding repertoire. **Jeremy Dibble**

'Long Time Ago'

Barber Four Songs, Op 13 – No 2, The Secrets of the Old; No 3, Sure on this shining night; No 4, Nocturne. The Desire for Hermitage, Op 29 No 10. Solitary Hotel, Op 41 No 4 **Bolcom** Cabaret Songs, Vol 1 – Amor; Waitin' **Britten** Night covers up the rigid land. Four Cabaret Songs – No 2, Funeral Blues; No 3, Johnny **Copland** Old American Songs – At the River; Long time ago; Zion's Walls. Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson – Heart, we will forget him! **Dring** Song of a Nightclub Proprietress **Finzi** I said to love, Op 19b No 3 **Heggie** Animal Passion. The Moon's the North Wind's Cooky **Ives** Remembrance. Songs my mother taught me **Quilter** Weep you no more, Op 12 No 1 **Vaughan Williams** Silent Noon **Roven** Listening to Jazz

Adèle Charvet *mez* **Susan Manoff** *pf*

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA556 (56' • DDD • T)



'An interior musical vibration invoking roots, emotions, passion, poetry and

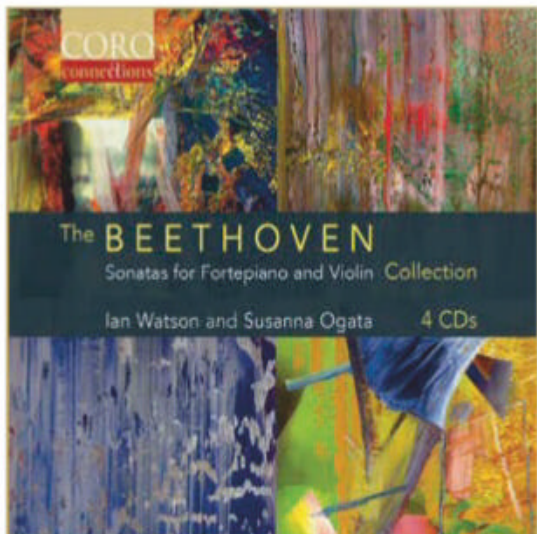
play, challenging the imprint of time, without denying its existence', is how a booklet note dauntingly describes this new recital of American and British songs from Adèle Charvet and Susan Manoff. The album, mercifully, is by no means as complicated or abstruse as you might think. Manoff has become so closely associated with the French repertoire through her work with such singers as Véronique Gens and Sandrine Piau that we tend to forget she hails from New York, where Charvet, born in France, also spent her childhood, and both performers, it would seem, have been keen to tackle the 20th-century English-language repertoire for some time.

Their programme, on the surface, is fancifully organised, with 'the idea of the turning wheel of cyclical time' at its centre and the songs grouped according to symbolic associations with the points of the compass, so East signifies 'childhood and play', West stands for 'renunciation and the metamorphoses of all things', and so on. In fact, its outline straightforwardly suggests the progress of life from youth to age,



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opening and closing with statements of spiritual affirmation from Copland's *Old American Songs*, and examining themes of love and loss, before closing with a touching celebration of the pleasures of sleep, solitude and the insights afforded by experience and time.

Much of it is beautifully done. Charvet has a warm, appealing mezzo, with a tangy lower register and fine dynamic control at the top. She's at her best in jazz-inflected or declamatory numbers, where her wide range impresses and the texts hit home. Copland's 'Zion's Walls' really does sound like gospel music here (as it should) rather than art song, and both Roven's 'Listening to Jazz' and Bolcom's 'Amor' bristle with bravado and wit. Barber's 'Solitary Hotel', with its clipped vocal line, suits her down to the ground, while Britten's 'Funeral Blues' starts a bit too mutedly but rises to a real snarl of grief and outrage at its climax.

In more lyrical songs, however, the somewhat close recording catches a pulse that creeps into her middle registers, which occasionally proves intrusive, most notably perhaps in Vaughan Williams's 'Silent Noon', despite the intelligence she brings to it. Manoff, though, as one might expect, is consistently stylish and wonderfully insightful throughout: there's some marvellous playing here as the bells of Barber's Zion ring out proudly at the start, a flurry of anticipation interrupts the sad tango of the Solitary Hotel and Britten's blues become increasingly fierce and distraught. Though not perfect, it's a consistently engaging recital, the best of which is very fine indeed. **Tim Ashley**

'Morgen'

Duparc Aux étoiles. Chanson triste. Extase. L'invitation au voyage. Phidylé. Sérénade florentine. La vie antérieure
Rachmaninov Six Songs, Op 38
R Strauss Malven. Vier letzte Lieder
Elsa Dreisig *sop* **Jonathan Ware** *pf*
Erato © 9029 53194-8 (77' • DDD • T/t)



Elsa Dreisig's striking debut album presented images of operatic characters ('Miroir(s)', 12/18). The French-Danish soprano, pianist Jonathan Ware and the ever-imaginative Erato have cooked up something similarly out of the ordinary for her first solo song album. The result is one of the most purely seductive recitals to have come my way for a long time.

It takes its name from one of Richard Strauss's best-known songs and, daringly,

dots his *Four Last Songs* (in soprano-and-piano guise) throughout a seductive selection of Rachmaninov and Duparc – with Strauss's late 'Malven' thrown in for good measure. Purist eyebrows might be raised but it proves a remarkably successful gambit: in Dreisig's introspective, understated performances we hear the *Four Last Songs* anew, each one fascinatingly set apart from the others in its new context.

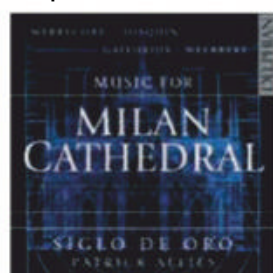
And thanks to Ware's superbly dappled and delicate way with the accompaniment, they come across less as pale imitations of the orchestral originals than something like evocative, distantly remembered echoes. That effect is partly also due, of course, to the rest of the programme – an exquisite selection in which emotions are largely kept veiled, remaining tentative until we get to the grand passions of the final songs of Rachmaninov's Op 38.

Dreisig's beautiful soprano is velvety and soft-grained, and matches the musical world Ware conjures up superbly – the album might be called 'Morgen' but the atmosphere is more one of hazy, dewy promise than bright dawn. She's a natural and instinctive communicator, although not one to push the text hard, letting it sit comfortably on the vocal line, whether in the Strauss, her rapt Rachmaninov or the delicious Duparc (the central pair of 'Chanson triste' and 'Extase' is especially exquisite).

The programme starts with a superb account of 'L'invitation au voyage'; and when we get to the end, with 'Morgen', Dreisig tellingly fills her line with an extra sense of warmth and hope that makes one just want to start again. It's all beautifully engineered, and includes a gentle interlude in the form of the premiere recording of Duparc's *Aux étoiles* for piano – the digital release includes two more solos from the superb Ware too. This is an album to relish. **Hugo Shirley**

'Music for Milan Cathedral'

Gaffurius O sacrum convivium **Josquin** Alma redemptoris mater/Ave regina caelorum. Inviolata, integra et casta **Phinot** Homo quidam fecit **Weerbeke** Ave regina caelorum, mater **Werrecore** Ave maris stelle. Beati omnes qui timent Dominum. Inclina Deus meus. Inviolata, integra et casta es Maria. Popule meus. Proh dolor
Siglo de Oro / **Patrick Allies**
Delphian © DCD34224 (66' • DDD • T/t)



This disc celebrates and contextualises the music of Hermann Matthias Werrecore

(c1500-c1574), *maestro di cappella* of Milan Cathedral for nearly three decades. A key figure in the post-Josquin generation and one of many *Oltremontani* (from over the Alps) working in northern Italy, his sacred works have not previously been recorded, despite the quality and variety of his settings and their clear influence by and homage to Josquin. Alongside six of his motets are also first recordings of works by Dominique Phinot (c1510-c1556) and Gaspar van Weerbeke (c1445-c1516).

The smooth, honeyed sound of Siglo de Oro is largely due to the soft and clear sheen of their radiant sopranos. As an ensemble they resemble The Cardinal's Musick both in tone and in their approach to the architecture of larger-scale motets such as Josquin's *Alma redemptoris mater*/ *Ave regina caelorum*: they choose unhurried tempos but maintain a clear forwards direction in phrasing. Most fascinating on this album are the contrasting settings of *Inviolata, integra et casta* by Werrecore and Josquin, which show a huge attention to detail in performance.

Despite the clear, generous tone of this ensemble, there are several impassioned moments where the middle voices use a wide vibrato: in solo sections of Werrecore's rather monumental setting of *Popule meus* in particular, this serves only to defocus the musical texture. Yet there are also moments of great beauty that show a tight control of ensemble singing: the heartfelt homophonic passages in Weerbeke's *Ave regina caelorum*, *mater* are deliciously contrasted with the busier polyphony on this disc. Exploring lesser-known repertoire in the Milan choirbooks, a work which also shines through is Gaffurius's *O sacrum convivium*, memorable for its gently unfurling opening phrases. To portray effectively such ranges of polyphonic textures is really exciting: this is a hugely impressive disc in both programming and performance.

Edward Breen

'The Soldier'

'From Severn to Somme'
Butterworth Six Songs from A Shropshire Lad – No 1, Loveliest of trees; No 2, When I was one-and-twenty; No 3, Look not in my eyes; No 5, The lads in their hundreds; No 6, Is my team ploughing? **Fauré** Les berceaux, Op 23 No 1 **Finzi** Channel Firing **Gurney** Black Stichel. In Flanders. Severn Meadows **Ireland** We'll to the woods no more – No 2, In boyhood **Ives** Three Songs of War – No 2, He is there! **Mahler** Revelge. Wo die schönen Trompeten blasen **Mussorgsky** Songs and Dances of Death – The Field-Marshal **Poulenc** La courte paille – No 7, Lune d'avril **Somervell** A Shropshire Lad – No 6,

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

A BAROQUE ADVENTURE

David Vickers forages intrepidly through a stack of recordings of German and Italian Baroque music from an assortment of enterprising performers



György Vashegyi directs the Purcell Choir and Orfeo Orchestra in a Passion oratorio by Gottfried Stölzel

A rich abundance of Italian and German Baroque music has recently become available – whether works were intended for liturgical use, courtly performances for patrons or public concerts.

Ensemble La Fenice's 12 *favoriti* sing with sensitive fluidity in Jean Tubéry's pseudo-liturgical **Monteverdi** *Vespers*. Full passages are reinforced by 31 young choristers from the choir school of Reims Cathedral. Textures have striking opulence and gentle spirituality. Delineation of complex 10-part contrapuntal writing throughout 'Nisi Dominus' is smudged by swampy acoustics, and even the transparency of smaller-scale solo pieces is blurred. Nevertheless, the *favoriti* in 'Ave maris stella' produce collective warmth and outstanding beauty, and the diminutions and *cantabile* phrasing of the instrumentalists in the 'Sonata sopra Sancta Maria' are masterful.

Countertenor **Matthias Lucht** sings with poetic tenderness (albeit unsteadiness) in Venetian solo motets by miscellaneous musicians employed at St Mark's during the early 17th century, most notably five motets by Bartolomeo Barbarino – an alto falsettist and chitarrone player who notated his own florid ornamentation. Keyboardist Jürgen Banholzer also plays a few solo pieces on an astonishing

organ from the 1530s in the *duomo* at Valvasone.

A later generation of Venetian solo sacred repertory is presented in the third book of *Motetti a voce sola* (1666) by **Natale Monferrato**, who joined the choir of St Mark's a few years before Monteverdi's death and eventually succeeded Cavalli as *maestro di cappella*. Parallels with the melodicism and structural forms of contemporary Venetian opera are obvious in nine alto motets probably composed for pupils at the Conservatorio dei Mendicanti. Countertenor Paulin Bündgen's exquisite phrasing and diction are matched by radiant melismatic declamation. Ensemble Céladon's rotating squad of theorbo, triple harp, bass viol, violone and keyboards play continuo realisations of emotional incision.

Vespers music from *Salmi a otto voci concertati* (1650) by the Benedictine nun **Chiara Margarita Cozzolani** is performed spiritedly by I Gemelli. Nine singers, pairs of violins, recorders, cornetts and sackbuts and a quintet of continuo players conjure splendid vitality, effervescent rhythmical interplay, light-footed glee and seductiveness according to the sentiment of each diverse piece; there is some obvious artistic licence with regards to flamboyant instrumentation. Emiliano Gonzalez Toro sings with rapturous piety in the solo motet 'O Maria, tu dulcis' from

Cozzolani's earlier *Concerti sacri* (1642), and a male trio relish sublime suspensions and melismatic echoes reinforced by cornett and trombones in *Duo Seraphim* by Caterina Assandra.

Giovanni Antonio Perti's oratorio *La lingua profetica del taumaturgo di Paola, San Francesco* (1700) depicts four characters at the late 15th-century French court: Charles VIII of Valois (an ardent Valerio Contaldo), his wife Anne of Brittany (Maria Cristina Kiehr singing with piercing clarity), the infertile Louise of Savoy (Lucile Richardot on heart-rending form) and St Francis of Paola in Calabria (sung compassionately by Stephan MacLeod). The saint prophesies that the two noblewomen shall each give birth, thereby ensuring the perpetuation of the royal lineage of France. Irrespective of the ponderous libretto, Perti's entrancing music is ideally served by Concerto Soave's adeptness at plaintive or sparkling string-writing and Jean-Marc Aymes's intuitive direction.

Alessandro Scarlatti's *L'Assunzione della Beata Vergine* (Rome, 1703) sets an oratorio libretto by Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni, but even qualified Roman Catholic theologians might struggle to make total sense of the opaque conversation about the Virgin's enraptured feelings that takes place between sopranos Sposo (Béatrice Gobin) and Sposa (Aurora Peña) and altos Amore (Mélodie Ruvio) and Eternità (Matthieu Peyrègne). Scarlatti's concise and cleverly constructed music is brought to life with shimmering textures and judicious fluency by Ensemble Baroque de Monaco; sloppiness from the violins is infrequent and marginal.

Schütz's preface to *Historia der Auferstehung Jesu Christi* (1623) describes pragmatic alternative options for musicians. Sigiswald Kuijken preserves the four viols accompanying the Evangelist (eschewing Schütz's comment that an organ or other continuo instruments can be used if necessary), although elsewhere the suggestion that one voice in duets is played by an instrument is sometimes adopted. La Petite Bande's slimline group of singers (gentle high tenors on the alto parts) and five instruments achieve refined lucidity; every detail is judged beautifully, and the crystalline narrative is supported throughout by organist Mario Sarcchia playing on a quiet stop (as Schütz instructs).

Fifteen 'sacred concertos' by **Johann Rösenmüller** selected from collections published in Leipzig (1648-53) are a quatercentenary tribute by Jochen Arnold's choir Gli Scarlattisti and instrumentalists Capella Principale.

Choral pieces are smoothly layered, but the most interesting pieces are the solos, duets or trios that offer a broad variety of instrumentation and moods, such as *Hebet eure Augen auf* (sung blithely by soprano and tenor in dialogue with two violins), the charming, dancelike *Herr, wenn ich nur dich habe* (soprano with two violins and three viols) and *Lieber, lieber Herre Gott, wecke uns auf* (low soprano with three trombones).

Johann Theile was one of Schütz's last pupils, befriended Buxtehude in Lübeck, inaugurated the Gänsemarkt opera house in Hamburg and succeeded Rösenmüller as Kapellmeister at Wolfenbüttel. All four of Theile's extant sacred concertos for solo soprano and instruments were probably composed by 1680, and are performed sublimely by Hamburger Ratsmusik and Dorothee Miels, whose effortless agility, timbral purity, perfect enunciation and emotive engagement are exemplified in *Jesu, mein Herr und Gott allein* and *Ach, dass ich hören sollte*.

The first German Passion oratorio was **Reinhard Keiser's** *Der blutige und sterbende Jesus* (Hamburg, 1705). The libretto was printed but the music lost until an autograph was rediscovered that turned out to be Keiser's revised version prepared in 1729 for Good Friday Vespers at Hamburg Cathedral. The chamber choir Cantus Thuringia includes experienced specialists who emerge for high-calibre solos (Monika Mauch, Dominik Wörner, Hans Jörg Mammel), and the orchestra Capella Thuringia's excellent recorders, flutes, oboes and bassoon are given tasteful support from the harpsichord by Bernhard Klapprott. Keiser's theatrical experience is evident in the acute sense of character and emotional immediacy of his inventive melodicism and penchant for striking instrumental textures.

Gottfried Stölzel's Passion oratorio *Ein Lämmlein geht und trägt die Schuld* (1720) was first performed not long after he was appointed Kapellmeister at the court of Saxe-Gotha. It was later shortened by about a third (possibly not by Stölzel) for a revival in about 1731, and this abridged version is presented by György Vashegyi, the Purcell Choir and Orfeo Orchestra (led expertly by Simon Standage). Stölzel's music is never less than imaginative and attractive, making it easy to understand why Bach performed this oratorio in Leipzig's Thomaskirche on Good Friday 1734.

It was a little earlier in 1734 that **Bach** performed *Blast Lärmen, ihr Feinde! Verstärket die Macht* (BWV205a) at Zimmermann's coffee house to celebrate

Elector Friedrich August II's coronation as King of Poland. A parody of *Zerisset, zersprenget, zertrümmert die Gruft* (1725), the lost score of the 1734 coronation version is reconstructed by Alexander Grychtolik. Deutsche Hofmusik's playing crackles with energy and bold sonorities to illustrate uproarious jubilation. Grychtolik also conducts his reconstruction of *Entfliehet, verschwindet, entweichet ihr Sorgen* (BWV249a), a birthday cantata for Duke Christian of Saxe-Weissenfels that was adapted soon after for the *Easter Oratorio*. Shepherdesses and shepherds address pastoral homages in music usually associated with loftier New Testament personages and theological depth. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Monteverdi Vespers
Ens La Fenice / Tubéry
Ligia **Ⓜ** (2) + **Ⓜ** 27856-5



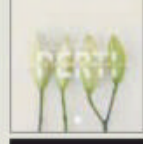
Various Cpsrs II Pesarino
Lucht, Banholzer
Fra Bernardo **Ⓜ** FB1909712



Monferrato Salve regina
Ens Céladon / Bündgen
Ricercar **Ⓜ** RIC405



Cozzolani Vespers
I Gemelli / Toro
Naïve **Ⓜ** V5472



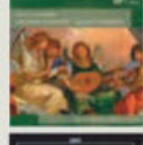
Perti La lingua profetica
Conc Soave / Aymes
Lanvellec **Ⓜ** LE00002



A Scarlatti L'Assunzione della BV
Ens Baroque de Monaco / Peyrègne
Paraty **Ⓜ** PARATY118176



Schütz Auferstehungshistorie
La Petite Bande / S Kuijken
Accent **Ⓜ** ACC24355



Rosenmüller Sacred Concertos
Gli Scarlattisti / Arnold
Carus **Ⓜ** CARUS83 500



Theile Seelen-Music **Miels;**
Hamburger Ratsmusik / Eckert
CPO **Ⓜ** CPO555 132-2



Keiser Blutige und sterbende Jesus
Capella Thuringia / Klapprott
CPO **Ⓜ** (2) CPO555 259-2



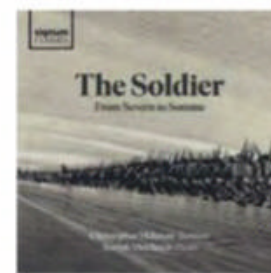
Stölzel Ein Lämmlein geht ...
Purcell Ch; Orfeo Orch / Vashegyi
Glossa **Ⓜ** GCD924006



JS Bach Celebration Cantatas
Deutsche Hofmusik / Grychtolik
DHM **Ⓜ** 19075 93639-2

On the idle hill of summer; No 7, White in the moon the long road lies; No 8, Think no more, lad, laugh, be jolly; No 9, Into my heart an air that kills **Schumann** Die beiden Grenadiere, Op 49 No 1. Der Soldat, Op 40 No 3 **Wolf** Gedichte von Eduard Mörike - No 5, Der Tambour

Christopher Maltman ten **Joseph Middleton** pf
Sigm **Ⓜ** SIGCD592 (74' • DDD • T/t)



A year after Ian Bostridge's 'Requiem: The Pity of War' (11/18), here comes

another British singer with a moving commemorative song programme. Both Bostridge and Christopher Maltman feature George Butterworth's *A Shropshire Lad* but the baritone dots his selection of five of them around a programme that he imaginatively splits into four parts, not by composer (as Bostridge does) but according to stations in a typical soldier's life.

The programme is rooted in English song, where Maltman has proved so at home ever since the release of his debut album two decades ago, but he shows his versatility by including songs in three additional languages (not to mention a burley American accent for Ives's 'He is there!'). The project's long gestation, explained in a personal note by the baritone, can be heard in every bar: it's a selection that has been honed over the years.

It takes us on a fascinating, moving journey through the early idylls of 'Home', the bitter horrors of 'Journey' and 'Battle' to the heartbreaking 'Epitaph'. The latter concludes with Poulenc's exquisite 'Lune d'avril'. Ireland's tender 'In boyhood', included as an encore, tries to return us to lost innocence.

Maltman's baritone is impressive and authoritative, and he's a sensitive, natural communicator who brings a directness to the songs' many emotions. It's never been a honeyed voice, and his recent expansion into larger operatic repertoire has, it seems, led to a greater spread in the higher register and at lower volumes, but the sincerity and integrity of his performances are compelling.

For his part, Joseph Middleton is superb in conveying all the worlds conjured up by some demanding piano-writing: from those delicately portrayed English landscapes to the thump of drum and artillery, Mussorgsky's bloody battlefield, Mahler's biting cold irony and Ives's twiddly Yankee-doodling. It all adds up to an affecting, intelligent recital that's well worth seeking out. **Hugo Shirley**

WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month, **Peter Quantrill**'s point of departure is ...

Beethoven's Symphony No 6, 'Pastoral' (1808)

No one can love the country as much as I do,' wrote Beethoven to Therese Malfatti in 1810. 'For surely woods, trees and rocks produce the echo which man desires to hear.' That last idea may tell us more about the *Pastoral* Symphony than the composer's often-quoted but potentially misleading direction to his listeners that the symphony is 'more the expression of feeling than painting in sounds'.

Rooted in the key of F, 'pastoral' by convention and pragmatism, there the symphony moves and rests, to a degree unprecedented for Beethoven's music and his time. He uses texture more than tonality to vary the landscape, radically prefiguring 20th-century minimalism and so much else. The narrative paints a picture of the composer within that landscape, on a walk, by a brook, with country folk, in a storm and thanking God for that storm's passing. Symphony No 9 would only take this idea to its logical conclusion, with the composer addressing his listeners through words rather than notes.

To convey this fusion of natural and supernatural feeling demands an interpreter of vision and spiritual reach no less than freshly sprung delight in Beethoven's tone-painting. On his day –

this 1992 concert was assuredly one of them – Tennstedt could unlock that access to the sublime, and share it with his musicians, like very few of his colleagues.

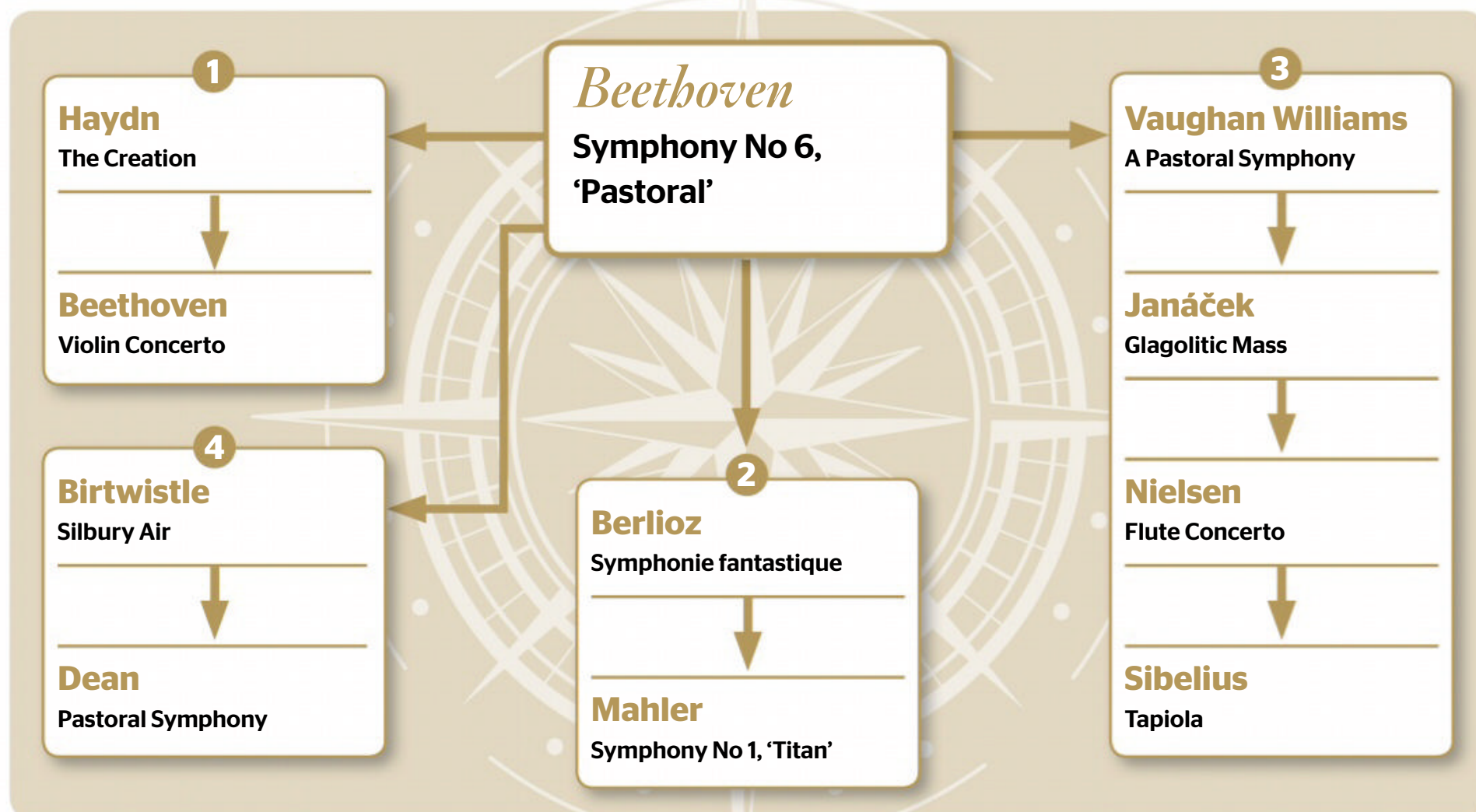
● London Philharmonic Orchestra / Tennstedt (LPO, 7/15)

1 *God in nature*

Haydn The Creation (1798) In March 1808, Beethoven attended a performance of *The Creation* given to celebrate Haydn's 76th birthday. While he had often held Handel in higher esteem than any other predecessor, he was so moved and struck by the oratorio's nature-painting that his own long-gestated thoughts on the *Pastoral* quickly took shape during the rest of the year.

● Kirkby sop Rolfe Johnson ten George bass New College Choir; Academy of Ancient Music / Hogwood (Decca, 3/91)

Beethoven Violin Concerto (1806) Bearing in mind the concerto's extended expression of serenity, and perhaps of religious faith within purely instrumental music, its gently rolling pace and





'Surely woods, trees and rocks produce the echo which man desires to hear', according to Beethoven

cloudless stretches of D major make sense of a seemingly uncharacteristic piece both on its own terms and as a 'dry run' for the *Pastoral*. Within almost every one of the first movement's 535 bars is a subtle impetus derived from the opening timpani idea – and Beethoven would redeploy such economy of rhythmic means in the symphony's opening movement.

● **Bavarian RSO / Kavakos** *vn* (Sony Classical, 1/19)

2 *The composer in his element*

Berlioz *Symphonie fantastique* (1830) The five-movement form and narrative scaffolding of the *Pastoral* expanded symphonic horizons for all Romantic composers. Berlioz labelled the *Symphonie fantastique* as an 'instrumental drama' in which he pays tribute to the principal source of inspiration (beyond, that is, his own experiences and rich inner life) by quoting motifs from the 'Scene by the Brook', but in truth, Beethoven is everywhere in this piece, not least through the person of Berlioz himself, exulting in the spotlight as the subject of his own work.

● **Mahler CO, Musiciens du Louvre / Minkowski** (DG, 10/03)

Mahler *Symphony No 1, 'Titan'* (1893 version) Write what you know, novelists are told. Mahler needed no second invitation when opening his symphonic account by returning to the *Pastoral*'s *Naturlaut* – sound of nature – with his own memories of a childhood spent on the edge of Bohemian woods and fields. Jettisoning the flower-strewn 'Blumine' scarcely obscured his debts to Beethoven, Berlioz and Brahms (with the quick-witted adaptation of a transitional passage from the finale of the Second Symphony, Brahms's own 'pastoral'). The nostalgic call of a trumpet (or bugle, or posthorn) in Mahler's first movement becomes an emblem of musical pastoralism for a new age.

● **Netherlands SO / de Vriend** (Challenge Classics, 6/10)

3 *Paradise lost*

Vaughan Williams *A Pastoral Symphony* (1921) Ever since Theocritus, the pastoral has supplied an imaginary realm for contemplation of lost love and life. Opening the symphony's second movement, a horn calls – in F major – from Wilfred Owen's sad shires of northern France, while F minor string chords beneath establish its war-torn context. There may be country folk dancing in the heavily scored scherzo, but are they 'rejoicing'?

● **Kenny** *sop* LSO / Thomson (Chandos, 8/88)

Janáček *Glagolitic Mass* (1926) Mediated through Schiller and others, oriental pantheism echoes through Beethoven's notebooks: 'I am all: what is, what was, what will be; no mortal man has ever lifted my veil.' Rambling outside Vienna affirmed his perception of God in nature, while Janáček arrived at a similar belief system through still observation of a frog or a raindrop ('As for being a believer – well, I am certainly not that!'). He was watching an electrical storm when he first conceived ideas for the *Glagolitic Mass*, and described forests, hills and sky as his cathedral.

● **Danková** *sop* Sýkorová *contr* Juhás *ten* Benci *bass* Prague Philharmonic Choir and Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra / Netopil (Supraphon, 10/14)

Nielsen *Flute Concerto* (1926) Pan's pipe is the archetypal instrument of the pastoral, accorded due prominence by Beethoven in the Sixth.

'The flute', explained Nielsen, 'cannot deny its own nature; its home is in Arcadia and it prefers pastoral moods.' The concerto's moods shift restlessly through stress and anxiety – another type of storm; altercations with Nielsen's instrument of disorder, the trombone – while returning always to an invocation of carefree humour which the solo part's idiom of nervous neoclassicism challenges us to take seriously.

● **Juliette Bausor** *fl* Royal Northern Sinfonia / Martin (Signum, 1/17)

Sibelius *Tapiola* (1926) Monotonicity – in this case B minor – hems in the listener to Sibelius's landmark of musical ecology with contemplations of death and finality, cultivated from micro-motifs in the manner of Beethoven's minimalist thinking in the *Pastoral*. Like the symphony at its golden point, *Tapiola* builds to a terrifying storm, manifesting the presence of Tapio, a northern-European counterpart to the Greek god Pan. The manner of his departure, or banishment, or reintegration within the forest during the tone poem's coda is no less mysterious than his arrival.

● **Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra / Lintu** (Ondine, 11/17)

4 *Pastoral 2.0*

Birtwistle *Silbury Air* (1977, rev 2003) From the initial inspiration of a mysterious man-made prehistoric mound in Wiltshire, Harrison Birtwistle mined a 15-minute instrumental ritual that fans out from a repeated central pitch and draws its urgency from the constant pulse alternations of threes, fours and fives. *Silbury Air* exemplifies the composer's career-long engagement with the countryside, but also with the kind of static and revolving tonal centres that mark out Beethoven's symphony.

● **London Sinfonietta / Howarth** (NMC, A/08)

Dean *Pastoral Symphony* (2000) 'This piece is about glorious birdsong, the threat that it faces, the loss, and the soulless noise that we're left with when they're all gone' – and the birds fall silent. Unsullied by counterfeit allusions to Messiaen's magpie or Beethoven's nightingale, Brett Dean's take on the receding pastoral – as a state of mind as well as a landscape – weaves both sampled and live instrumental birdsong in and out of a dawn (or twilit) chorus of warped melody, increasingly frenetic and abruptly halted.

● **Aurora Orchestra / Collon** (Warner Classics, 9/15)

Available to stream at Apple Music

Opera



Mark Pullinger revisits a popular *La traviata* from Covent Garden:

'Ermonela Jabo gets inside her character so thoroughly that one cannot help but suffer with her' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 91**



Mike Ashman welcomes Janowski's supremely focused *Der Freischütz*:

'The cast features the much-discussed new star Lise Davidsen as an Agathe of one's dreams' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 92**

Beethoven

Leonore

Marlis Petersen *sop*.....Leonore
Maximilian Schmitt *ten*.....Florestan
Johannes Weisser *bar*.....Pizarro
Dimitry Ivashchenko *bass*.....Rocco
Robin Johannsen *sop*.....Marzelline
Johannes Chum *ten*.....Jaquino
Tareq Nazmi *bass*.....Don Fernando
Florian Feth *ten*.....First Prisoner
Julian Popken *bass*.....Second Prisoner

Zurich Sing-Akademie; Freiburg

Baroque Orchestra / René Jacobs

Harmonia Mundi © ② HMM90 2414/15

(140' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation

Recorded live at the Philharmonie de Paris,

November 2017



We recall that *Fidelio* was first given as *Leonore* – in Vienna in November 1805, in three acts – before an

uncomprehending audience of invading Napoleonic troops. Acts 2 and 3 corresponded to the first part of *Fidelio*'s Act 1 (although in a different order and with two extra numbers) and to *Fidelio*'s Act 2, albeit with many differences in the grand final scene, the 'public' part. *Leonore*'s Act 2 began with a different version of Pizarro's entrance march, included a (later cut) duet with obligato instruments for Marzelline and Leonore then continued to the end of *Fidelio*'s Act 1. But there was a wholly different curtain: in 1805 the prisoners are dismissed to their cells earlier without singing, and Pizarro and the chorus finish the act with another bloodthirsty march finale.

Leonore in 1805 was very number-orientated. Act 1 began with Marzelline's aria, then came her duet with Jacquino, then a trio with Rocco (soon cut), then the famous quartet. Each of the work's three acts was centred by Beethoven around one style and one character: Act 1: Singspiel Marzelline; Act 2: Melodrama Leonore;

Act 3: Tragic Florestan. In keeping with his normal practice, René Jacobs's new performance does not present a carbon copy of the original work as it survives but seeks a structure dramatically self-explanatory for our time. This is done with knowledge, taste and skill, far removed from crude modernising. After checking the 1806 and 1814 further versions of the score, Jacobs presents here a slight augmentation of the dialogue, especially around Marzelline in Act 1. Also she is given 'Zärtliche Liebe', a 1795 Beethoven song, to sing when she works in the prison, and allowed to join in with her father Rocco at the end of 'Hat man nicht auch Gold beineben' (this aria is now regularly taken into *Fidelio* performances we hear today). She is also given a dialogue from the 1806 version which allows her to make up with Jacquino after Leonore is revealed to be a woman.

Jacobs writes a passionate note in the CD booklet championing 1805 as the best version of the opera. He then backs it up with a swift, dramatic musical performance. As in the past, the result often sounds like a young Klemperer with original instruments, never afraid to let wind, brass or drums speak their parts out as contributors to Beethoven's dramatic timbre. If you find his tempos distractingly swift – for examples, check the Prisoners from this Act 2 or the trio around the bread in Act 3, 'Euch werde Lohn' – remember that our *Fidelios*, with weightier modern Romantic orchestras, have tended to get slower.

It makes for a performance well prepared and cast with the lighter (but always agile) voices that Jacobs tends to favour. Johannsen enjoys herself with Marzelline's florid part – in this 1805 version she is effectively promoted to the role of co-principal with Leonore. The Act 2 duet 'Um in der Ehe froh zu leben' – a loss much regretted after 1805 – surely sees one of the first professional attempts by near contemporaries to borrow the effect of Mozart's *Figaro* 'Sull'aria'. Petersen is excitingly fluent in 'Ach, brich

noch nicht, du mottes Herz', Leonore's Cherubini-like and altogether more virtuoso aria of intent to free her husband. The men throughout are in reliably good voice, but don't expect *Heldenstimmen*.

The recording – live from the Philharmonie de Paris a little over two years ago – serves both show and composer well. I find this the most convincing version of *Leonore* yet. It never sounds merely like a *Fidelio* *manqué* and comes highly recommended.

Of course, there does not have to be an original versus revision winner. Yet, despite Jacobs's arguments about the 1805 version's greater tensions (especially, he believes, the ending after the trumpet and the Minister's arrival), it is hard to throw off the spectacles of hindsight and not find the whole *Fidelio* structure much tighter than the obvious operatic space-filling of *Leonore*'s original Act 2. **Mike Ashman**

Fall

Die Dollarprinzessin

Christiane Libor *sop*.....Alice
Magdalena Hinterdobler *sop*.....Daisy Gray
Angela Mehling *sop*.....Olga Labinska
Thomas Mohr *ten*.....John Couder
Ferdinand von Bothmer *ten*.....Fedy Wehrburg
Ralf Simon *ten*.....Hans Freiherr von Schlick
Tobias Haaks *ten*.....Dick
Marko Cilic *ten*.....Tom

Chorus of the Musikalische Komödie, Leipzig;

Munich Radio Orchestra / Ulf Schirmer

CPO © ② CPO777 906-2 (122' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Prinzregententheater, Munich, November 24-25, 2012

Includes synopsis



When Leo Fall's *Die Dollarprinzessin* opened in Vienna in November 1907,

one critic concluded that Fall 'was almost too refined for operetta'. A backhanded compliment is still a compliment, though, and *Die Dollarprinzessin* took Berlin by storm, swept into the West End on the



Mozart in Milan: Tobias Kehrer and Sabine Devieille in an outstanding *Entführung* from La Scala – see review on page 89

coat-tails of *The Merry Widow* and opened as *The Dollar Princess* on Broadway, where Jerome Kern was enlisted to add a little local colour. As well he might: Fall's romantic comedy is set in a Viennese fantasy version of the USA where – just to keep things relatable for operetta regulars – the New York plutocrat John Couder makes a point of employing only penniless European aristocrats.

Fall has a lot of fun with his American setting. There's an 'Automobile Trio', complete with honking motor horns, and the opening chorus features musical typewriters. The setting drives the plot, too: three impoverished Europeans (two aristos and a fake) and three wealthy Americans try to negotiate the competing claims of true love and getting very, very rich. But there's never any doubt where Fall's sympathies lie and musically it's closer in spirit to Johann Strauss than to Lehár, with extended finales that rival *Der Zigeunerbaron* for musical sophistication. Fall's woodwind-writing is a particular delight, from the bassoon that chuckles through the opening bars to the delicate oboe introduction to Act 2's playful 'Paragraph eins' duet.

This complete recording – so far as I can tell, the only one currently in the

catalogue – was made during live performances in Munich in 2012, though there's little trace of the usual theatrical scuffles and footsteps. Ulf Schirmer and his cast clearly love the piece. Rhythms and phrasing are stylish without being mannered and no allowances need be made for any of the voices here. Christiane Libor is warm and expressive in all registers as Daisy and Ralf Simon's tenor has a nicely bronzed tone and hint of swagger as the dispossessed Hans von Schuck. Magdalena Hinterdobler and Ferdinand van Bothmer are appropriately brighter and lighter as the comic couple Daisy and Fredy, and Angela Mehling is just unbelievable enough as the bogus countess Olga.

The chorus is notably light-footed; and if I say that Schirmer tends to lean into the more romantic and sentimental numbers at the expense of much sense of satire, well, that's really more of an observation than a criticism in such a warm-hearted piece. Unfortunately the presentation is poor: there's no explanation for why the order of two numbers in Act 3 has been reversed, and plotwise we get a synopsis, numbered (confusingly) by the score rather than the track-listing, but no libretto. Another black mark for a CPO operetta disc: let's hope they do better next time. **Richard Bratby**

Grétry

Raoul Barbe-bleue

Chantal Santon-Jeffery *sop*Isaure

François Rougier *ten*Vergy

Matthieu Lécroart *bass-bar*Raoul

Manuel Núñez Camelino *ten*Osman

Eugénie Lefebvre *sop*Jeanne

Enguerrand de Hys *ten*Viscount de Carabi

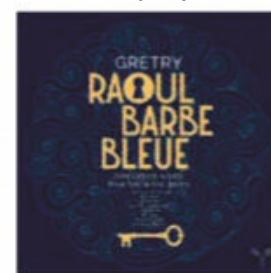
Jérôme Boutillier *bar*Marquis de Carabas

Marine Lafdal-Franc *sop*Jacques

Orkester Nord / Martin Wählberg

Aparté ® ② AP214 (87' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Premiered in March 1789, months before the storming of the

Bastille, Grétry's take on the Bluebeard tale, as told by Perrault, proved strong stuff for Parisians. 'Such subjects ought not to be shown on stage', thundered the *Mercure de France*, fazed by the intrusion of brutality (in the onstage murder of the evil Raoul) into the lightweight genre of *opéra comique*. To no avail. Part fairy-story, part rescue opera, *Raoul Barbe-bleue* survived regime changes in France and crossed borders.

In his memoirs Wagner recalled how, after hearing the opera in Dresden as a five-year-old, he would march around the house in a paper hat singing Raoul's air of vengeance 'Perfide, tu l'as ouverte'.

As Grétry admitted himself, his prime gift was for simple, graceful melody, exemplified here in a pretty duet for two peasants and the mellifluous Act 1 solos and duet for the heroine Isaure and her lover (and later rescuer) Vergy. When the action hots up Grétry's harmonically limited idiom can sometimes seem too tame for the situation. Yet as early critics picked up, there are scenes of real power, including Isaure's long solo in Act 2 culminating in her horrified opening of the forbidden door and her agitated duet with Vergy (shades here of Gluck), and two tense trios, the second one pitting the despairing lovers against Raoul's offstage threats.

The Trondheim production on which this recording is based stressed grotesque visual comedy, not least at the moment when Isaure discovers the decapitated corpses of Raoul's wives. On disc the comedy is largely confined to the dialogues involving the comic valet Osman, gleefully camped up by Manuel Núñez Camelino. With a well-chosen, largely Francophone cast and trim playing from the Norwegian period band there is plenty of tension in the more dramatic numbers. Martin Wählberg has a sure feeling for pacing and makes the most of the score's instrumental colours – say, the low, luring horns in the duet between Raoul and Osman or the glaring trumpets and piccolo in the battle music.

Both in song and spoken dialogue all the singers sound at ease in *opéra comique*. Chantal Santon-Jeffery is a radiant Isaure, shaping her music gracefully while mustering ample dramatic intensity *in extremis*. As Vergy, François Rougier fields an attractive high, light tenor and acts well with the voice. Matthieu Lécroart, a sonorous if slightly rough-toned bass, blusters formidably as Raoul; and the Spanish *haute-contre* Manuel Núñez Camelino, as Osman, shows himself a natural comedian, effectively milking his 'foreignness'. The recording is well balanced and presentation first-rate, with libretto in French and English and an essay by David Le Marrec that makes an eloquent case for an opera that surprised Parisians with its 'austere beauties' and 'sombre and savage character'. **Richard Wigmore**

Lully

Phaéton

Mathias Vidal *ten* Phaéton
Léa Trommenschlager *sop* Climène
Victoire Bunel *mez* Théone
Elizaveta Sveshnikova *sop*... Astrée/Première Heure
Éva Zaïcik *mez* Lybie
Lisandro Abadie *bass-bar*... Saturne/Epaphus/Jupiter
Aleksandr Egorov *bass-bar* Mérops
Viktor Shapovalov *bass*..... Protée
Alfiya Khamidullina *sop*..... Seconde Heure
Cyril Auvity *ten*..... Triton
Le Poème Harmonique; MusicAeterna
Choir and Orchestra / Vincent Dumestre

Stage director **Benjamin Lazar**

Video director **Corentin Leconte**

Château de Versailles Spectacles © (2) + DVD

CVS015 (149' • DDD • NTSC • PCM stereo • O • s)

Recorded live, June 2018

Includes synopsis



Phaéton was the last of Philippe Quinault's librettos for Lully to be

based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. After its premiere at Versailles on January 6, 1683, it opened at the Opéra in April. Known as 'the people's opera', it was revived many times, right up to 1742. It has been well served on CD: here is another version, complementing the DVD of a staging from the 18th-century Opéra Royal at Versailles. The performance is a joint venture between Le Poème Harmonique and MusicAeterna, the early music ensemble based in Siberia.

The tale is one of hubris. Phaéton rejects Théone, not out of love but because he sees marriage with Lybie, daughter of king Mérops, as his path to the throne. This provokes the wrath of Epaphus, who taunts Phaéton by casting doubt on his parentage. The Sun confirms that he is Phaéton's father, but the young man demands more: he drives the Sun's chariot across the heavens and, losing control, is struck down by Jupiter. And yet his fate is both inevitable and desired: it's predicted by the sea god Protée, and Phaéton himself says that he would prefer a brilliant death to an obscure life.

In the Prologue, Saturn invites the goddess Astrée to return to the Earth, from which she was expelled long ago, as a new golden age has emerged under 'the greatest of heroes'. This is, of course, the usual extolling of the unnamed Louis XIV. The director, Benjamin Lazar, provides a connection with the opera proper by making the ensuing story a flashback. Astrée is seated at a table with a globe

and a revolver: puzzling, but all is made clear at the end of the opera.

The scenery and costumes are a mixture of old and new, with some lavishly neo-Baroque headgear. The video projections are variably successful. In the Prologue, children at play conjure up idyllic scenes of childhood, and the final conflagration is imaginatively done. But the Chaconne in Act 2 is not enhanced by images of soldiers marching and goose-stepping, followed by a parachute drop; likewise the Bourrée in Act 5, which is accompanied by – among other things – shots of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh hailed by enthusiastic crowds.

Benjamin Lazar has worked with Vincent Dumestre before. As in the Molière/Lully *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* (Alpha, 5/06) – I haven't seen *Cadmus et Hermione* (Alpha, 2/09), but I imagine the same is true – the singers employ 17th-century pronunciation: so that, for instance, the last letters of 'vous' and 'voulez' are sounded, and 'foi' comes out as 'fwé'. And there is much stylised gesturing, sometimes synchronised.

The ambitious, headstrong Phaéton is not a sympathetic character. Mathias Vidal is good at showing his resentment and his sense of entitlement; a more appealing side is shown when he reflects on his cruel treatment of Théone – and how tenderly he is accompanied by the strings! When Phaéton tells the Sun that he is not frightened by death, Vidal's hushed tones are even more effective than Emiliano Gonzalez Toro's vigorous proclaiming on Christophe Rousset's CD recording. The other *haute-contre* is Cyril Auvity: he is in slightly better voice on the Rousset, where he takes the same three roles.

Éva Zaïcik and Victoire Bunel are excellent as Lybie and Théone, neither of whom is getting the man she wants. Their Act 1 duet on the difficulties of love is nicely observed. Léa Trommenschlager is a formidable Climène, first encouraging her son, then anxious when Protée – a seedy portrayal by Viktor Shapovalov – foretells his death. The most moving moment in the opera comes in the scene towards the end where Lybie and Epaphus – powerfully performed by Lisandro Abadie – face permanent separation.

The Russian chorus and the Franco-Russian orchestra perform well for Vincent Dumestre, though to my ears the playing of the recorders in the 'sleep' scene is slightly sharp. There are one or two cuts, as there are on the Marc Minkowski recording. For a CD-only version, you couldn't go wrong with either Minkowski or, even better, Rousset. If you want a DVD this staging,

despite its oddities, will not disappoint. And, oh yes, the revolver: rather than a thunderbolt from Jupiter, it's a pistol shot from *Astrée* that dispatches the hapless Phaéton. **Richard Lawrence**

Selected comparisons:

Minkowski (8/94) (ERAT) ➔ 4509 91737-2

Rousset (1/14) (APAR) ➔ AP061

Mozart

Die Entführung aus dem Serail

Lenneke Ruiten *sop*.....Konstanze

Sabine Devieille *sop*.....Blonde

Mauro Peter *ten*.....Belmonte

Maximilian Schmitt *ten*.....Pedrillo

Tobias Kehrer *bass*.....Osmin

Cornelius Obonya *spkr*.....Pasha Selim

Chorus and Orchestra of La Scala, Milan /

Zubin Mehta

Stage director **Giorgio Strehler**

Video director **Daniela Vismara**

C Major Entertainment (F) (2) DVD 752008;

(F) Blu-ray 752104 (155' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O • s)

Recorded live 2017

Includes synopsis



This performance from 2017 is a re-creation of the famous production first seen at the Salzburg Festival in 1965. It was

mounted to mark the 20th anniversary of the death of its director, Giorgio Strehler. That first production featured a cast led by Fritz Wunderlich, Anneliese Rothenberger and Fernando Corena. A television recording of the 1967 revival was issued on DVD: there the leading singers are Luigi Alva and Ingeborg Hallstein, with Corena, Reri Grist and Gerhard Unger repeating their roles. The conductor at Salzburg was Zubin Mehta, with the Vienna Philharmonic; and here he is again, half a century later, this time at La Scala, Milan.

The designer was Luciano Damiano, whose death in 2007 is also commemorated. One set covers the entire action: a view of the sea and the occasional passing ship, with domes alternating with arches to left and right. The costumes for the Europeans are of period elegance, Belmonte sporting a three-cornered hat; Osmin has baggy trousers and an enormous turban. The USP of the production is the lighting, the characters often shown in silhouette. There is no consistency about this, the change from light to dark and back often taking place in the course of an aria; but the effect is striking, especially when the characters are motionless. It does mean, of course, that the facial expressions are invisible: a pity when, for instance, the music tells us that Blonde takes her cue from her mistress when the women forgive the men for doubting their chastity.

The production, as revived by Mattia Testi, has its irritations. Konstanze's great aria of defiance, 'Martern aller Arten', should be hurled at Pasha Selim; but the curtains close for the long introduction (the camera focusing on the orchestra) and, when they reopen, Konstanze is alone. And the dreadful custom of singers bowing after their arias – or, worse, exiting and reentering to bow – should have been dispensed with. But Strehler/Testi handles the balance between the comic and the serious so astutely that negative reactions seem unimportant. The scene where Pedrillo gets Osmin drunk is genuinely amusing, with no concessions to political correctness. Konstanze is by turns despairing and resolute: it's all in the music, but Lenneke Ruiten's superb performance – touchingly acted, fluently sung – makes you both believe and care.

Zubin Mehta takes 'O wie ängstlich' quite slowly, allowing Mauro Peter time to articulate the florid passages clearly; Peter also makes a good fist of the tricky

arpeggios in 'Ich baue ganz'. 'Wenn der Freude Tränen fließen' is, sensibly, omitted: it holds up the action when Belmonte and Konstanze should be falling into each other's arms. The Blonde and Pedrillo are excellent. Sabine Devieille soars effortlessly into the musical stratosphere before giving Osmin a hard time in the spoken dialogue, while Maximilian Schmitt is quite unfazed by starting his 'Romanze' with the wrong line.

Tobias Kehrer repeats his Osmin from the recent Glyndebourne version (Opus Arte, 8/16): here he looks more convincing and his resonant bass sounds even better. Strehler/Testi underplays the dangerous side of his character, but Kehrer does not disappoint in his 'O, wie will ich triumphieren'. Cornelius Obonya is a passionate Selim, prone to anger even when forgiving and releasing his captives. (His humorous remark to Osmin about Blonde's dangerously sharp nails is omitted.) You might not associate Mehta, or indeed La Scala, with Mozart, but the pacing – deliberate in the Act 2 finale as well as in 'O wie ängstlich' – seems just right, and the playing is splendid. The balance is good, too: you can really hear the obbligato instruments in 'Martern aller Arten' and the woodwind in what the late Stanley Sadie called the delectable scoring of 'Ich baue ganz'. Ignore the odd remarks about Osmin in the booklet note, tolerate the subtitles' occasionally loose translation of the libretto: this is a delight.

Richard Lawrence

Smyth

Fête galante

Charmian Bedford *sop*.....Columbine

Carolyn Dobbin *mez*.....The Queen

Felix Kemp *bar*.....Pierrot

Simon Wallfisch *bar*.....The King

Mark Milhofer *ten*.....The Lover

Alessandro Fisher *ten*.....Harlequin

Lontano Ensemble / Odaline de la Martinez

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Lehmann

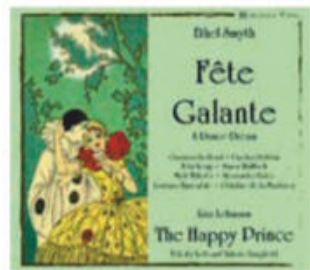
The Happy Prince

Felicity Lott *soprano* Valerie Langfield *piano*

Retrospect Opera © RO007 (77' • DDD)

Includes synopsis and libretto

With extracts from *Fête galante*, *The Boatswain's Mate* and *Entente cordiale* (1939), performed by The Light Symphony Orchestra / Sir Adrian Boult



I have a pet theory that certain composers do their finest work with

their lightest touch – and if you've never quite warmed to Ethel Smyth's orchestral or choral music, here's a disc that might just win you to her cause. *Fête galante*, dating from 1923, is a 45-minute opera-ballet, scored for chamber-size forces and brimming over with melody, fantasy and – as the story, a cross between *Petrushka* and a Watteau pastoral, gradually unfolds – some surprisingly strong emotions.

Smyth conceived it as a miniature fusion of all the arts, with Ballets Russes production values. Musically, it's a product of that post-Great War rediscovery of the Baroque; think *Pulcinella* or Ravel's *Tombeau de Couperin*. But in Smyth's scenario (the libretto is adapted from a story by the banking heir Maurice Baring) these princes and Pierrots form a pair of interlocking love-triangles whose elegant emotional gavotte gradually darkens. The music, initially buoyant and playful, gradually clouds and grows eerie. Smyth's instinct is so sure, and her ear for colour so engaging (there's even a tiny, jangly onstage band of concertina, piano and banjo) that you barely sense the emerging tragedy until it's too late.

I'd love to see it staged, and hopefully this delightful premiere recording will make that a lot more likely. It's an ensemble piece in every sense, and under Odaline de la Martinez the singing of the cast is as light, lively and expressive as Lontano's playing – perfectly weighted to the material, though Carolyn Dobbin's Queen (sensuous as well as graceful) and Felix Kemp's plangent, doomed Pierrot make a particular impression. The choral singing is equally well focused.

The coupling is *The Happy Prince*, a melodrama based on Oscar Wilde's poem by the London-born composer Liza Lehmann (1862-1918); and as with all melodramas, you'll have to decide for yourself whether Lehmann's poetic, Parry-ish solo piano score justifies sitting through the full 20-minute story.

Certainly, it's hard to imagine it delivered with more love or finesse than it receives here from Felicity Lott and Valerie Langfield. A trio of historic Smyth recordings from Adrian Boult makes a delightful encore to a very rewarding disc. **Richard Bratby**

Verdi

La traviata

Ermonela Jaho *soprano* Violetta

Charles Castronovo *tenor* Alfredo

Plácido Domingo *baritone* Germont

Aigul Akhmetshina *mezzo* Flora

Catherine Carby *mezzo* Annina

Thomas Atkins *tenor* Gastone

Germán E Alcántara *baritone* Baron Douphol

Jeremy White *bass* Marquis d'Obigny

Simon Shibambu *bass-baritone* Doctor Grenvil

Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House /

Antonello Manacorda

Stage director **Richard Eyre**

Video director **Ross MacGibbon**

Opus Arte © DVD OA1292D; Blu-ray OABD7260D

(136' + 13' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,

DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • s)

Extra features: Introduction to *La traviata*; Behind the Movement; Interviews with Richard Eyre and Bob Crowley; Cast Gallery

Recorded live, January 23 & 30, 2019

Includes synopsis



Can it really be 25 years since the BBC ripped up the television schedules at short notice to broadcast the new

Traviata live from Covent Garden? Richard Eyre's 1994 production is still going strong, double-, triple- or quadruple-cast most seasons. Familiarity breeds contempt, though, its knockers forgetting that bums on seats for a run of *Traviata* help finance the likes of *Oedipe* and *King Roger*. It's a beautiful staging, opulently designed by Bob Crowley, from the sparkling rotunda of Act 1 to the pastel shades of Violetta's country residence and the gilded glamour and skewed perspectives of the gambling scene at Flora's. I happily return most runs to catch the latest soprano to don those iconic frocks.

Over the years, there have been some corkers: Anna Netrebko, along with Jonas Kaufmann and Dmitri Hvorostovsky providing one of my best nights at the Garden, Sonya Yoncheva, Ailyn Pérez, Venera Gimadieva, Corinne Winters and, surprisingly, Marina Poplavskaya, whose Act 3 was dramatically intense. One of the most gut-wrenching Violettas over the

years has been Ermonela Jaho, who made her house debut stepping in for an indisposed Netrebko for three performances in 2008. The Albanian soprano has returned to Eyre's production for three runs since then, the latest providing us with this new account on DVD and Blu-ray just as the staging's 17th revival takes place.

The production's 1994 incarnation was full of firsts: Eyre's first time directing opera, Angela Gheorghiu's first Violetta and – most surprisingly – Georg Solti's first time conducting Verdi's great work. It's been instructive to watch that recording again and compare it with this new version. There has been a video release in between, but that needn't detain us, Renée Fleming phrasing everything with rehearsed precision and zero emotion. Gheorghiu is more naturally suited to Verdi than Jaho, coping remarkably well with the demanding coloratura of 'Sempre libera'. Jaho treads more gingerly here, and her tone is never what one could call 'lustrous', but she gets inside the character so thoroughly that one cannot help but suffer with her; Germont's demands wound us as they wound her and she battles so hard in Act 3 that one harbours a hope that Violetta may fight to see another day.

Charles Castronovo is a splendid Alfredo, his bright, springy tone capturing the character's impetuosity better than the solid but vocally dull Frank Lopardo back when the production was new. His 'De' miei bollenti spiriti' is wonderfully sung and his partnership with Jaho is touching.

Leo Nucci was a decent Germont *père* back in 1994, his baritone typically dry but firm. However, I'd take Nucci in a heartbeat over Plácido Domingo, whose masquerading as a baritone continues. Eyes glued to the prompt box, Domingo's tone is hollow, his intonation wild. How Antonello Manacorda and the ROH Orchestra cope with his wayward tempo shifts in 'Di Provenza il mar' is anyone's guess. No other singer would get rebooked on this showing. This is not how I want to remember the great tenor.

Andrew Sinclair was, once again, in charge of this revival. One of his touches I particularly like is at the end of Act 2, where Germont – instead of staring out Alfredo after Baron Duphol has challenged the youth to a duel – takes Violetta's arm and escorts her from the room. Minor roles are effectively cast, from rising star Aigul Akhmetshina's flighty Flora to the veteran Jeremy

White's blustering Marquis d'Obigny. Manacorda conducts sensitively, not always with Solti's zip, but supports his singers well. 'Baritone' aside, an enjoyable memento of an enduring production.

Mark Pullinger

Selected comparisons:

Solti (9/95^R, 6/01) (DECC) 071 431-9DH

Pappano (OPAR) OA1040D

Weber

Der Freischütz

Lise Davidsen *sop* Agathe

Andreas Schager *ten* Max

Sofia Fomina *sop* Aennchen

Alan Held *bass-bar* Caspar

Markus Eiche *bar* Ottokar

Franz-Josef Selig *bass* Hermit

Andreas Bauer *bass* Cuno

Corinna Kirchhoff *spkr* Samiel

MDR Leipzig Radio Choir; Frankfurt Radio

Symphony Orchestra / Marek Janowski

Pentatone (M) ② PTC5186 788 (116' • DDD/DSD)

Includes libretto and translation



With a project as well realised as this, one reflects how Weber and Kind's great 1821

work may still be undervalued as a radical piece of music theatre. It was the first great German Romantic opera; a 'spook' story certainly, contemporary with the first literary Dracula and Frankenstein tales, but also the first to look at that subject matter from a psychological point of view as opposed to just crude theatrics. It is an *opéra comique* with spoken dialogue (or should be – see below) but Weber's all-embracing musical setting knocks hard at the door of through-composed music drama. There is not really a Leitmotif system at work here but the musical identification of character and motif is every bit as instant as in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. Indeed, its influence can still be heard in Bizet's *Carmen* half a century later.

Despite, or because of, these challenges *Der Freischütz* has long been lucky on the gramophone: a much-loved early Joseph Keilberth (now Warner, 11/89), admired performances under Wilhelm Furtwängler (various labels), Colin Davis (RCA/Sony, 7/91, and LSO, 8/13), Kleibers father (various) and son (DG, 12/98) and Harnoncourt (Teldec/Warner, 11/96).

Marek Janowski is on something of a golden run at the moment with German stage classics on disc – the Pentatone mature Wagner; an even better *Ring* cycle briefly seen on Sky from his belated

Bayreuth debut; *Hänsel und Gretel*. His second *Freischütz* (the first was on RCA/Sony, 1/95) has a more, shall we say, relevant cast – which brutally means less Italianate – and a searching relationship with the Frankfurt orchestra. In this – although I suspect the maestro has no direct interest in this 'school' as such – a large modern orchestra plays with all the colour and varying tonal weight of an informed period band. Everything from bumpy local peasant dancing and brass bands to ghost-like tremolandos and intervals in the Wolf's Glen is brought fully into focus.

The cast features the much-discussed new star Lise Davidsen as an Agathe of one's dreams – the voice sounding fuller and more secure at the bottom than on her debut recital album; the interpretation of the role (not so easy to pin down) already clearly much worked on. Andreas Schager is Max, her wavering fiancé-to-be, with just the right amount of *Helden* to lyric in the voice. Fomina is a spicy and unpredictably colourful Aennchen, Held a less black and weighty but characterfully rich villain Caspar. Smaller roles and chorus are all in good voice.

There is a serious 'but': although the rest is so strong I'm going to suggest you ignore it, even if you have to spend much extra time programming your CD player. It's been decided to replace Kind's (in my view, excellent) dialogue with narrations spoken in the characters of Samiel and the Hermit. They're written and directed by Daniel Weber and Katharina Wagner, who happens to be the great-granddaughter of one of the opera's earliest and most passionate champions. Because these narrations are spoken by the voices of those characters, the effect is to do much more than merely tell the story. It adds a director's 'onstage' interpretation (as it were) to the mix. And this Samiel is played by a woman ...

Try before you either throw up your hands in horror or welcome a novelty. Otherwise I'd put this new release right at the top of the pile – until we get a major period-instrument release.

Mike Ashman

'Caruso 1873'

Bizet Les pêcheurs de perles – Mi par d'udir

ancora **Cilea** Adriana Lecouvreur – No, più

nobile **Cottrau** Santa Lucia^a **Dalla** Caruso^b

De Curtis Tu ca nun chiagne **Gomes** Il Guarany –

Sento una forza indomita^c. Salvator Rosa – Mia

picciarella **Handel** Serse – Frondi tenere ... Ombra

mai fù **Leoncavallo** Mattinata **Massenet** Élégie.

Manon – Chiudo gli occhi^d **Niedermeyer** Pietà,

Signore **Nutile** Mamma mia che vo' sapé?^e

Pergolesi Tre giorni son che Nina **Puccini**

La bohème – Vecchia zimarra **Rhodes** Parce

que (Because) **Rossini** Petite Messe solennelle –

Domine Deus **Rubinstein** Néron – Lumière du

jour **Tchaikovsky** Sérénade de Don Juan, Op 38

No 1 **Verdi** I Lombardi – Qual voluttà trascorrere^f

Roberto Alagna *ten* with ^{cf}**Aleksandra Kurzak** *sop*

^f**Rafał Siwek** *bass* ^d**Stéphanie-Marie Degand** *vn*

^{ab}**Julien Martineau** *mandolin* ^{be}**Nicolas Montazaud**

perc **Orchestre National d'Île-de-France** /

Yvan Cassar *pf*

Sony Classical (E) 19075 95048-2 (72' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



What's this?

Roberto Alagna

singing Colline's

Coat Aria from

La bohème? Has he followed other tenors in (mis)appropriating baritone and bass roles? Fear not. He is merely treading in the footsteps of Enrico Caruso, who – according to legend – leapt to the defence of a bass who'd lost his voice to sing 'Vecchia zimarra' during a performance. Caruso even recorded the aria too.

This disc is Alagna's own tribute to his favourite tenor. His great-grandparents knew Caruso in New York and he clearly feels a strong connection. Alagna wouldn't be the first tenor to cite Mario Lanza's film *The Great Caruso* as an important influence on career choice, but this album is evidently a labour of love. It's not a collection of Caruso's 'greatest hits' but a judicious selection showing the enormous breadth of his recorded repertoire. Alagna would seem to be something of a gramophone 'nerd'; although there is no attempt to imitate Caruso's tone or his famous 'sob', he does adopt the great tenor's phrasing and tempos. But when his tenor rings out, it's pure Alagna.

It's interesting to hear repertoire that lyric or *verismo* tenors would rarely touch today, such as Handel's 'Ombra mai fù' (sung with a fine sense of legato), but the most fascinating items are those arias from long-forgotten operas, such as Anton Rubinstein's *Néron*. Alagna is joined by his wife, Aleksandra Kurzak, and bass Rafał Siwek for the final trio from Verdi's *I Lombardi* – a hit number back in the acoustic era, even if the opera remains little performed; all three singers do it full justice.

French arias from *The Pearl Fishers* and *Manon* are sung in Italian to a piano accompaniment, along with Caruso's own ornaments – not preferable to the



Plácido Domingo, in his new guise as a baritone, and Ermonela Jaho star in the latest incarnation of Richard Eyre's staging of Verdi's *La traviata* – see review on page 91

originals but an interesting excursion into historical performance practices at the turn of the 20th century. The acoustic for the piano-accompanied numbers is quite boxy, but then that itself reflects the conditions in which Caruso himself recorded.

The disc opens with Lucio Dalla's pop song 'Caruso', which was also set down by Luciano Pavarotti but is done more operatically here, and to round things off, there's a 'vintage' bonus track on which Alagna sings the Neapolitan song 'Tu ca nun chiagne', recorded on a wax cylinder, taking us back to the process Caruso himself used. There's something very charming about this album. It deserves every success. **Mark Pullinger**

'Majesty'

Gluck *Orfeo ed Euridice* – Overture; *Che fiero momento* **Massenet** *Thaïs* – Dis moi que je suis belle **Mozart** *Don Giovanni* – Mi tradi quell'alma ingrata **Puccini** *La bohème* – Donde lieta uscì; Sì, mi chiamano Mimì. Gianni Schicchi – O mio babbino caro. *Manon Lescaut* – Intermezzo. *Turandot* – Tu che di gel sei cinta **Tchaikovsky** *Eugene Onegin* – Letter Aria. *Iolanta* – Why haven't I known this before?

Maija Kovalevska *sop* **Liepāja Symphony**

Orchestra / Atvars Lakstīgala

Odradek © ODRCD372 (52' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



The Latvian soprano Maija Kovalevska first came to prominence in 2006 when she won Plácido Domingo's Operalia competition, which led to debuts at the Metropolitan Opera and the Wiener Staatsoper. I saw her sing Mimì in the old John Copley *Bohème* at Covent Garden in 2012, crushing a vocally diminished Rolando Villazón. We've not seen her in London since.

This album of operatic arias is entitled 'Majesty' and there's certainly an imperious ring to her bright, hard tone which earns the 'majestic' tag. It's not a tone I warm to, however. 'Mi chiamano Mimì, ma il mio nome è Turandot.' Her Mimì sounds as if the ice princess herself had swept into Rodolfo's Parisian garret; April's first

kiss here is a suitably chilly one, the voice spreading under pressure. 'Donde lieta uscì' is similarly robust, with little hint of the seamstress's frail health by the opera's third act. 'O mio babbino caro' does demonstrate a little charm and her Liù is affecting in 'Tu che di gel sei cinta'.

Away from Puccini, Kovalevska could possibly get away with her wild Donna Elvira 'Mi tradi' in the opera house, but not on disc. Her Thaïs has a vehement, commanding presence in her 'mirror' scene. The best items are the two Tchaikovsky excerpts – *Iolanta* and Tatyana's Letter Scene – where she reins in her powerful *spinto* at times and you get a sense of real characters being portrayed.

Atvars Lakstīgala and the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra are dutiful partners, allowed brief moments in the spotlight in the Overture to Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and a sumptuous intermezzo from Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*.

Readers may take to Kovalevska's soprano more readily than I do. One to sample before purchasing. **Mark Pullinger**

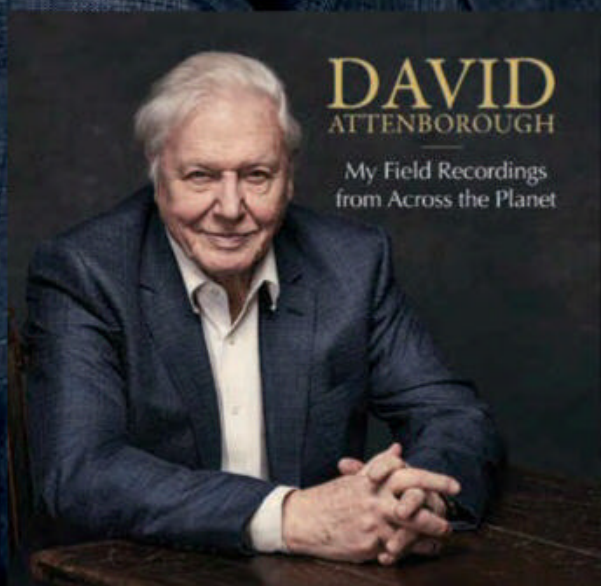
*“While I was theoretically looking for pythons,
in the evenings I would record different types of music...”*

David Attenborough reflects on his time filming *Zoo Quest* between 1954-1963

DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

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THE WORLD MUSIC COLLECTOR

The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

Kit Downes

Dreamlife of Debris

ECM © 77837555



Dreamlife of Debris has its roots in Kit Downes' 2015 recording *Vyamanical* (Slip), that documents the

improvisations on various church organs taken during a walking tour of houses of worship. The concept was taken up by ECM records and resulted in 2018's *Obsidian*, which in turn has led to *Dreamlife of Debris*, where the peripatetic element has been removed and the emphasis switched to exploring the tonalities and textures of two church organs (at the church of St John the Baptist in Snape and St Paul's Hall, Huddersfield University) through a series of original compositions. Once the organ parts had

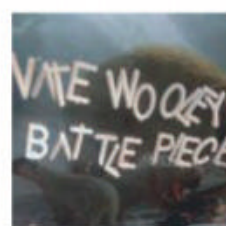
been recorded, Downes then integrated acoustic piano into the overall scheme. The dreamlike ambiance and melodies he created were then given extra depth by the contributions of his guests on tenor sax, guitar, cello and drums through overdubbing. The result is a unique musical experience – texturally and melodically rich, it's strangely and eerily moving.

Stuart Nicholson

Nate Wooley

Battle Pieces 4

Relative Pitch © RPR1097



Trumpeter Nate Wooley explains the set-up of his *Battle Pieces* as a 'social form' which, in practice, works out as a network of nested together structures, one designated soloist improvising on the parameters of a

piece as the other members of the group weave around a loose-leaf book of shorter and longer compositions; then the spotlight shifts to a different soloist. Compositional forms are digested inside improvisations that could not exist without the very thing they are devouring. If this all sounds academic and contrived, fear not. The music is quick-witted and elegantly expressive. Wooley opens with fast, yet soft sounds, mute in place, like he's summoning up the spirit of Rex Stewart or Cootie Williams; Ingrid Laubrock has plenty of scope to unravel her trademark digressive lines; pianist Sylvie Courvoisier and Matt Moran (vibraphone) paint with rich harmonic palettes. There's no bass, no drums, which helps keep these instrumental textures fluid and restlessly on the move, dividing and re-grouping, clustering together then fragmenting, like blood cells. **Philip Clark**

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

Souad Massi

Oumniya

Wrasse Records © WRASS361



Souad Massi's career has followed an uneven path since her 2001 debut album, *Raoui*, earned her a nomination for Best

Newcomer at the inaugural Radio 3 Awards for World Music. Although she subsequently won an award for her third album, *Mesk Elil* (2005), there's a nagging feeling that she hasn't quite lived up to her early promise. The lightweight *Ô Houria* (2010) was a low point, and although *El Mutakallimun* (2015) was a significant improvement, its settings of Arabic poetry seemed like an interesting side project rather than a major statement. All that can now be forgotten, for I'm going to stick my neck out and hail *Oumniya* as her finest set since her

debut 18 years ago. Sung in Arabic and French, the ten songs fuse North African styles and chanson into a beguiling sound, full of yearning melodies sung in a cool and compelling voice. From the mellifluous Arabic pop of 'Yadra' to the gorgeous Gallic balladry of 'Pays Natal', Massi's voice has surely never sounded more exquisite, while her songwriting tackles such heavyweight subjects as forced marriage ('Je Veux Apprendre') and political corruption in her homeland ('Fi Bali'). **Nigel Williamson**

Malinky

Handsel

Greentrax Records © CDTRAX402



It's hard to believe that Malinky, those champions of Scots song, are 20 years old, having formed back in 1999. For this significant

anniversary the band haven't disappointed. The title, *Handsel*, refers to a good-luck gift, especially to mark a special occasion and entirely apt here. Welcoming guests such as Barbara Dymock, Hector Riddell and Len Graham among many others, they deliver a double CD celebration of their history and passions. Songs from the Child Ballads, the Greig-Duncan Collection and the Scottish Traveller tradition frequent throughout. The first CD consists of new recordings, while the second includes rare demos and live tracks gleamed from the band's extensive performance career. With such a strong selection of songs and tunes to choose from it is almost impossible to choose particular highlights; suffice to note *Handsel* is caricatured by effective vocals, subtle instrumentals and a genuine focus on the power of Scots song and voice. A must-have for anyone interested in Scottish traditional song. **Billy Rough**

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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Beethoven boxed



Peter Quantrill immerses himself in three 'complete' collections of the master's music

A little under 15 years ago, BBC Radio 3 cleared the schedules for a fortnight to broadcast Beethoven, morning, noon and night. My son had been born a few days earlier and so, at untimely hours, I sat with him in my arms while the *Cantata on the Accession of Leopold II* or the grave and lovely little C minor Mandolin Sonatina comforted us both (or at least me). Now, in a less sleep-deprived state, I'm even more struck than before by a distinct personality – not always but more often than not touched by genius – running like a watermark through every note he wrote, and not only the familiar masterpieces occupying perhaps a third of his output (still, what a hit-rate – much higher than Mozart or Schubert, for example).

Like many of us, Beethoven kept a collection of motivational epigrams on his desk. His derived from ancient Egyptian religious beliefs, via Schiller: 'I am all, what is, what was, what will be; no mortal man has ever lifted my veil.' His conversation and private notebooks also record a thorough, self-taught grounding in the classics – 'For fate gave man courage to endure', copied out from *The Iliad*, is one typical example of many – and if you made a word map from his correspondence, 'struggle' would be the one in 72pt red. The composer singled out *Leonore/Fidelio* ('None of my other children has given me such trouble') but struggle and transcendence, the one towards the other, were themes that occupied him, and his music, throughout his life. More and more I listen out for those themes in performance, alongside the humour that is not always bitter or rough – Beethoven did not write the Heiligenstadt Testament or the Ninth Symphony every day of his life – but rather touches the songs and less familiar chamber music in particular. For some of us Beethoven is a daily presence, and any of these anniversary boxes perform



a service if we find in them music to live with, buried among all the Opus and WoO and Hess and Kinsky numbers.

Symphonies and concertos

There are still new things to be said about these most over-recorded of works, some of them most recently said by Adám Fischer and the Danish Chamber Orchestra (Naxos, 12/19) – bold and quirky readings which place the nine symphonies (there's

no place for the sketches of the Tenth in any of the boxes) in their own time, on the cusp of the 19th century. It's a shame that the Naxos compilers have instead played safe with the label's 1990s cycle directed by Béla Drahos: modern-instrument, chamber-orchestra performances, neatly played and inflected by historical awareness but no less pedestrian for all that, and certainly no match for the Harnoncourt cycle reissued by Warner Classics.

With some historical perspective, it was Harnoncourt and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe who produced a blueprint for the architecture of countless modern Beethoven performances: athletic, graceful and titanic in equal measure, as Stephen Johnson remarked in his original review (11/91); respectful to the spirit if not always the letter of Beethoven's metronome marks; democratically balanced choirs of wind and strings, undogmatically adopting lighter bowing and purer tone, with trumpets, drums and trombones making never less than decisive interventions (most memorably the Jovian thunderbolts at the climax to the Second Symphony's first movement; in fact the Second as a whole would be my desert-island choice for the piece).

The selection from DG, by contrast, sprays around symphonic largesse like champagne from an F1 podium. Four complete cycles are headlined by BPO/Karajan (1961, on Blu-ray audio) and ORR/Gardiner. Two further cycles are created by picking cherries from Chailly in Leipzig, Abbado in Berlin, Giulini in Los Angeles and Karajan in Berlin (1976 this time, with the Ninth), with the Seventh tucked in from Andris Nelsons's new cycle in Vienna. A separate 'Vienna cycle' has been assembled from Bernstein, Böhm, Kleiber, Monteux, Schmidt-Isserstedt and Nelsons again (No 8).



The Artemis Quartet place a marker in the sand of how Beethoven's music sounds to us now

A 23 CD appendix of 'classic' and 'period instrument' recordings sets the DG box apart from its competitors, and this opens with a whistlestop tour of Beethoven from the ever more quickly receding world of the first half of the last century, inevitably beginning with Nikisch and the first movement of the Fifth. An 84-minute Furtwängler disc gets to the heart of this particular symbiotic relationship, with the 1947 *Egmont* and Fifth Symphony, mid-war accounts of *Coriolan* and *Leonore* No 3, and a no less fierce *Grosse Fuge* from 1952.

So much choice, so many classic performances, very many of which may well already find a place on your shelves. Yet they enshrine a conservative mindset which unsettles me in this most perpetually radical of composers. Two generations of listeners have grown up comparing not (or not only) Bernstein with Karajan in this music, but Gardiner with Brüggen and Hogwood, to mention only the two most distinguished period-instrument symphony cycles from the Universal stable which this collection ignores. A pertinent point about changing imperatives in Beethoven interpretation, of the kind outlined in the last issue by Richard Osborne, would have been made by a symphony from Abbado's

first recorded cycle in Vienna juxtaposed with his stripped-back Berlin remakes.

Likewise for the piano concertos, Levin and Gardiner are presented as the only 'period' game in town, in complement to a much more heterogeneous collection of 'traditional' performances than the symphonies, from Argerich on her most tigerish form with Ozawa in the First (2017), in stark contrast to Buchbinder and Thielemann, a performance only otherwise available at the Berlin Philharmonic's

For some, Beethoven is a daily presence, and these boxes perform a service

Digital Concert Hall and recorded the previous year, though it might as well be half a century ago. Warner perhaps missed a trick by not complementing Harnoncourt's symphony cycle with Aimard's equally eventful journey through the concertos. Schiff and Haitink in Dresden looks like a safe choice by comparison, and in such company the Naxos cycle with Stefan Vladar holds up well, with the Capella Istropolitana on their best form and always in lively sync with their soloist.

Aside from Zehetmair/Brüggen in the 'period' appendix of the DG set, Violin Concerto recordings across all three sets belong to an ersatz-Brahmsian tradition that has only recently begun to cede to more dynamically shaped, no less profound accounts (which again DG could have heeded by including Mutter's remake with Masur rather than the very Karajan-led staple of its catalogue). A notable rarity in this section of each set is Beethoven's abortive early attempt to write a Violin Concerto in C major; DG and Warner both offer rather raw, 1970s recordings of speculative completions, whereas Naxos more persuasively has a new, Czech-made version which appears to stop where Beethoven left off, and played with an attractive sense of late 18th-century style by Jakub Junek.

Chamber and Piano

Surely no one acquiring the Warner set could be disappointed by the inclusion of the Artemis Quartet. These German-made studio recordings date from the first decade of the present century and they place a marker in the sand of how this music sounds to us now, experienced

with or without ‘period’ tuning (and intonation). Lively tempos, sharp attacks and light vibrato belong to a different, much less earthbound world to the Kodály Quartet, who formed an early backbone of the Naxos catalogue. There is an edgy, sometimes skittish quality to the sound of the Artemis that better suits the Op 18 and late quartets than the ‘Rasumovsky’ trio, and it’s complemented by French-made new and recent recordings of substantial rarities such as the *Notturmo*, Op 42 (an arrangement of the Op 8 string-trio Serenade) which should belong to every viola player’s repertoire, or so you would think after listening to Gerard Caussé. Live performances from Lugano of the piano quartets, with and without Argerich, lift off the page compared to the studio-bound alternatives from DG and Naxos.

Where DG’s policy of multiple performers and performances comes into its own is the piano music. CD33 is an education in itself, traversing Gilels, Kocsis, Arrau and Kovacevich through the Opp 7, 10 and 13 sonatas. As well as Pletnev and Cascioli making mischief in the lesser-known variation sets, we have Curzon and Gilels in the *Eroica* Variations; the *Hammerklavier* with Kempff, Pollini, Gilels and Perahia; and Op 110 with Kempff, Pollini and Brendel, live in Salzburg in 2007. Hived off in a ‘Rarities’ section of mostly new recordings is, finally, a fortepiano sequence to set beside Steven Lubin in the *Moonlight*: Tobias Koch on a quixotic 1832 instrument from his own collection, playing mostly Hess-numbered sketches including a more elaborate second version of *Für Elise*.

Vocal and stage

Leif Segerstam emerges as an unlikely hero of the Naxos collection, contributing new and freshly imagined readings of the works for church and stage that have been overshadowed by Beethoven’s milestone works in those genres. On the strength of the two early imperial cantatas, the Mass in C, *Christ on the Mount of Olives* and the music to *King Stephen* and *Egmont*, his insights into *Fidelio* and the *Missa solemnis* would be worth hearing; instead, Naxos has recycled decent but unremarkable versions from their back catalogue and licensed Herbert Blomstedt’s shrewdly cast 1805 *Leonore* from Berlin Classics, with Edda Moser outstanding in the title-role.

The same *Leonore* reappears in the Warner Classics box, as does Hilary Davan Wetton’s 2011 Naxos account of *Der glorreiche Augenblick*, which makes much the most persuasive account on record of

an unfashionable work that is never likely to fill concert halls but deserves renewed attention for its vision of a united Europe in the wake of the Napoleonic wars as well as its illuminating anticipations (in 1814) of ‘late’ Beethoven. The Warner set suffers from an inverse weakness to the Naxos box in this area, largely reliant on the work of other labels but crowned by Klemperer’s *Fidelio* and *Missa solemnis*, which will never go out of fashion.

For the choral and stage rarities, DG has the luxury of the recordings made in advance of its 1997 collection, directed by the likes of Abbado, Chung and Thielemann, but their polished sound and execution don’t always compensate for a lack of the energy and impact that distinguish Segerstam’s performances. Gardiner’s recordings of the two Masses carry all before them, not least in comparison to the additional *Missa solemnis*: Karajan in 1966, with all 86 minutes on a single CD and a cast to savour (Janowitz, Ludwig, Wunderlich and Berry) but also an overlit recording, fallible choral work and a recourse to ponderous ceremonial that could hardly have been anticipated from the mould-breaking symphony cycle of five years earlier.

It seems extraordinary in 2020 that we still lack a ‘period’ Fidelio

Struggle is the word that defines *Leonore/Fidelio*, not least in Beethoven’s determined attempts to perfect it; Gardiner drew on all three for his *Leonore*, which is especially strong in the secondary roles (Christiane Oelze as Marzelline, Franz Hawlata as Jaquino) but now seriously challenged by René Jacobs in the ‘pure’ 1805 version (reviewed on page 86). It seems extraordinary in 2020 that we still lack a ‘period’ *Fidelio*: Abbado in Lucerne came close to Rattle in Berlin in persuading his symphonic-orchestra musicians to adopt ‘period’ manners but his singers don’t follow suit; if the Warner compilers had chosen to expand their set in the manner of DG’s, the COE/Harnoncourt recording would have made an ideal complement to Klemperer.

As it is, the *Fidelio* quotient in the DG box is enhanced by a DVD of the Bernstein/Otto Schenk staging in Vienna, and more significantly by a suite of excerpts in the ‘Classic Performances’ appendix. From Patzak and Böhm, incandescent in Florestan’s scena (1950), to the Prisoners’ Chorus with Solti (1979) via Fricsay’s sublimely weightless handling of the

Quartet (1957) and more, the sequence illuminates the opera’s history on record in ways that the remainder of the supplement rarely equals.

However, the first half of the disc (CD113) enterprisingly juxtaposes Bartoli and Pavarotti, both raising goosebumps with *In questa tomba oscura*, the former accompanied by András Schiff on a Bösendorfer, the latter in a souped-up orchestration, yet no less imbued with dignity and seriousness of purpose. It’s the best known of several Italianate scenes and arias which the young Beethoven composed early in his career, most of them as exercises set by Salieri and conceived on a grand scale as if in emulation of Mozartian masterpieces such as *Popoli di Tessaglia*, and exploring them has been a particular delight of my private Beethoven-athon. These too have been newly recorded for Naxos by the indefatigable Turku Philharmonic and Segerstam, several featuring the splendid Finnish soprano (and Mariinsky company member) Reetta Haavisto.

DG and Warner have both licensed serviceable but old Berlin Classics recordings of this repertoire, whereas in the piano-trio folk-song settings commissioned from Beethoven by the Edinburgh publisher George Thomson they have their own versions – unlike Naxos, which has licensed German-based performances made for Brilliant Classics. The DG set was a revelation of the 1997 box, with a team of top-class native singers led by the pianist Malcolm Martineau, while the Warner collection has been newly recorded in France.

The sheer scale of Beethoven’s efforts – most profitable ones – for Thomson makes it all too easy to overlook the care he took over his arrangements, and the corresponding dedication required of their performers. The pianist Jean-Pierre Armengaud and his colleagues stand comparison with Martineau et al as elegant accompanists recorded in an appealing small-church acoustic, and the best of the young singers (soprano Juliette Allen and mezzo Natalie Pérez) bring a homespun simplicity to their singing that feels true to the material, sometimes more so than the polished artfulness of the DG performances, but there’s no substitute for English sung as it is spoke.

Questions of design

Why splash out on any of these sets if you can’t work out what’s inside them? Most compactly packaged of all three, the Warner box will fit snugly alongside



Leif Segerstam emerges as an unlikely hero of the Naxos collection

the rest of your Beethoven collection – perhaps too snugly. The outer sleeve may only be eased on and off the open-topped box with a most un-Beethovenian level of patience. A slim booklet offers an index, artist photos and an incisive overview of life and works by David Wyn Jones – but no track-lists. These are printed only on the wallets and in a type-size requiring frequent recourse to the booklet index. The wallets themselves are colour-coded by genre and imaginatively illustrated by apposite landscapes from Ruisdael and Gainsborough to Caspar David Friedrich, but packed so tightly that a handful must be removed before you can flick through the remainder.

The Warner box isn't a usefully browsable edition, whereas the flip-top lid to the Naxos set and more generously apportioned elbow room encourage more lucky-dip discoveries. Penny-plain, functional presentation in the Naxos house style displays a condensed track-list on the back of each wallet, with the details laid out sparsely and in full in the booklet. However, there's no index, and Keith Anderson's matter-of-fact notes keep the curious-minded listener at arm's length.

Those arms, both of them, had better be well toned to lift the DG box on and off whichever reinforced shelf it occupies. The multiple performances only partly account for the additional bulk of the box, containing 123 discs to the 90 CDs in the Naxos set and 80 in the Warner. There are fat booklets for each section by genre,

containing full, elegantly laid out track-lists. Several essays in each booklet are separated by well-chosen illustrations and printed in three languages, with sung texts and translations for all the vocal works, even the folk songs. Most of the essays are new, and they range far beyond boilerplate generalities, addressing themselves to all the major works in specific terms of context, style and technique, yet largely unburdened by the heavy hand of academese.

All three labels have chased down scores for hitherto unrecorded fragments

That's not all: a large-format hardback book rests to the side of the CDs, entailing a large empty space beneath the discs which explains why the DG box is around three times the size of its competitors. The lavishly illustrated book opens with an essay on 'Beethoven: The Man' by Barry Cooper, reworked and updated from his contributions to the still invaluable *Beethoven Compendium* published by Thames & Hudson in time for the 1997 anniversary. The first of two chronologies places Beethoven in the context of the world around him with a distinct Anglo-centric bent: did you know that 1824 brought not only the premiere of the Ninth Symphony but also the foundation of the RSPCA, and the first labour unions in England? Or that the first US baseball

team dates from the following year? What that tells us about the genesis of Op 132 I couldn't say.

The second chronology details Beethoven's many upheavals and significant premieres, on a curious, lined background from which the text floats distractingly free. The images are all usefully captioned, but to find out who painted Beethoven's brother with his lazy eye you'll have to consult the index at the back. This follows a baffling index to the discs which is organised by section rather than alphabetically, and listed by opus number (followed by WoO numbers, then Hess and so on), so the *Namensfeier* Overture (sorry, *Zur Namensfeier*) appears under 'Orchestral', between the Eighth and Ninth symphonies, rather than with all the other overtures in the 'Stage' section, and the entry for *Leonore* (Hess 109/110) is nowhere near *Fidelio* (Op 72). The Warner Classics index is a model of lucidity by comparison.

Conclusions

All three labels have chased down scores for hitherto unrecorded fragments for these new sets, most of them inevitably composed for piano and/or solo voices and strings, and the 'Unknown Beethoven' site has compiled a useful list of which particular sketch or draft is present in one set and not the others. Most of them last less than a minute; but if both the G minor and major versions of a 1792 piano *Anglaise* are essential listening, along with countless other shavings from the master's workbench, the Naxos box presents almost every last jot and tittle in modern and largely reliable recordings. For a bird's-eye view of the composer as we hear him now, the Warner box is a clear first choice. Disc for disc, it also contains the highest percentage of performances in a style that Beethoven would have recognised: a strong recommendation in itself. The DG box, as befits its size and price (more than twice as much as the other two, though still a snip in relative terms compared to the 1997 edition) aspires to and often achieves much grander ambitions, telling a history of Beethoven in performance, and of our evolving perception of the composer over a century of recording. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

Beethoven Complete Edition

Naxos © (90 discs) 8 500250

Beethoven Complete Works

Warner Classics © (80 discs) 9029 53988-2

Beethoven The New Complete Edition

DG © (118 CDs + ② DVD + ③ Blu-ray Disc) 483 6767

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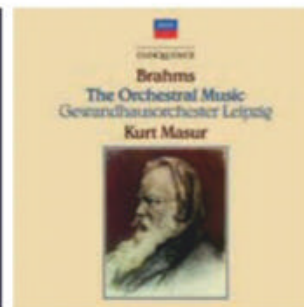
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BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan offers a personal selection of some worthwhile CD bargains

There's one thing you can guarantee when listening to recordings by **Friedrich Gulda** – whether it's recorded live or in the studio, what you'll hear will defy expectations. Gulda could be austere classical, outrageously inventive, deeply poetic, romantic and more; for him, the musical moment was what mattered most, as these frequently inspired Stuttgart solo recitals amply prove. In the present context Bach is principally represented by selections of the '48' played on an electronically magnified clavichord which, while occasionally sounding like 'Bach meets *Blue Hawaii*', finds Gulda on brilliant form, especially in the dramatic A minor Prelude and Fugue, BWV889 (Book II), and a dazzling account of the *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue*. At the other end of the spectrum comes half an hour's worth of zany improvisations with his trio, Inner Circle, where Gulda applies himself to clavichord, recorders, crumhorn and vocals while soprano Ursula Anders looks after the percussion section and Günther Rabl plays the double bass. The overall effect? Unpredictable, aurally fascinating – and at times seriously weird. Elsewhere in the set there are eight Beethoven sonatas (which number Opp 13, 27 No 2, 81a, 101, 110, and 31 No 2 among their ranks), including a witty account of Op 31 No 1 in G (just try the first movement's coda – it positively winks at you) and a *Hammerklavier* (unfortunately spread over two discs) that declaims its profound message with precision and passion, especially in the *Adagio sostenuto*. There's also a superb set of the *Eroica* Variations, while Mozart is represented by Piano Sonatas K333, K457 and K576. Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert (here the D845 Sonata) were Gulda's musical daily bread, which he more often than not baked to perfection, but perhaps the most revealing items here are the complete run of Debussy's *Préludes* Book 2, where the classical Gulda and Gulda the jazzier (here represented by a couple of his own piano pieces) seem to rub shoulders: I'm thinking especially of 'Ondine' and 'La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune', both remarkable for Gulda's acute sense of rhythm and his intuitive understanding of Debussy's forward-looking harmonic world. I've rarely heard playing of Debussy that is more exquisitely shaded. Add a sequence of 'encores' introduced by



the pianist himself and you have a collection to treasure.

I'm sure Gulda would have applauded Alpha's **'Early Piano'** collection which begins with CPE Bach, Graun and Hesse fortepiano trios, followed by Haydn sonatas played by Bobby Mitchell on a restored Viennese fortepiano from 1799. Then there are Beethoven's last three sonatas with Alexei Lubimov playing a Graff fortepiano from 1828 and his *Eroica* Variations (and more) featuring a Christopher Clarke instrument modelled on a c1818 Fritz fortepiano made in Vienna, played by Olga Pashchenko. Gulda would probably have especially relished the songs of Béranger as sung by baritone Arnaud Marzorati with harmonium and Pleyel piano accompaniment. Baritone Thomas Bauer offers a most perceptive rendition of Schubert's *Winterreise* with Jos van Immerseel employing the full range of tonal colour offered by another Clarke fortepiano (1988). Then we have Arthur Schoonderwoerd playing a Chopin programme on a Pleyel piano from 1836; Schumann's music for trios nimbly dispatched by clarinetist Paul Meyer, violinist Gordan Nicolitch, cellist Christophe Coin and pianist Éric Le Sage; and lastly Liszt, a varied collection headed 'Mazeppa' (which, naturally, is included), given by Patrick Scheyder with gothic-style address on an 1846 Pleyel piano. The sounds on offer here are extraordinarily varied (adding substantially to our experience of each piece), and the recordings capture them with impressive clarity.

Kurt Masur and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra offer a more traditional sort of treat with **'Brahms: the Orchestral Music'**: an all-embracing warmth, impressive depth of tone and consistently sympathetic playing. Heinrich Schiff's cello really sings in the Double Concerto, and if violinist Salvatore Accardo proves a worthy partner (and a fine soloist in the Violin Concerto) his playing falls short of true individuality. Masur's solidity pays high dividends in the

symphonies, especially in the first, where the finale enjoys a momentous preparation that's very well controlled. Misha Dichter is perhaps marginally more impressive in the Second Piano Concerto than in the First, though both performances relate an appropriate sense of musical scale. The two serenades are beautifully done, No 1 wearing a springlike demeanour, No 2 more autumnal in spirit. Good performances of the two overtures, the *Haydn* Variations and the complete *Hungarian Dances* (the one digital recording here) complete the package. The sound is finer than I recall it from its vinyl incarnation. If you like your Brahms amiable rather than gripping (such as in the hands of Klemperer, Rosbaud, Walter, Wand and Toscanini), choose Masur.

Grieg's 'Complete Symphonic Works' receive bracing and entirely sympathetic performances from the WDR SO under Eivind Aadland, especially the *Symphonic Dances*: try either the first or the fourth – both marvellous performances. Herbert Schuch gives his all in the Piano Concerto, and *Peer Gynt* is represented by the two suites plus vocal scenes on the last CD. The *Holberg Suite* compares with the best available from elsewhere, the youthful Symphony in C minor as played almost levels with Bizet's equally youthful Symphony in C, and the rest conveys Grieg as a master orchestrator, especially when it comes to writing for strings. Excellent sound ensures a wholehearted recommendation. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

'Friedrich Gulda: the Stuttgart Solo Recitals, 1966-1979' Gulda *pf* Inner Circle

SWR Music © ⑦ SWR19081CD

'Early Piano' Various pianists et al

Alpha © ⑩ ALPHA569

'Brahms: the Orchestral Music' Accardo *vn*

Schiff *vc* Dichter *pf* Masur *cond* et al

Decca Eloquence © ⑧ 484 0144

'Edvard Grieg: Complete Symphonic Works'

Schuch *pf* Aadland *cond* et al

Audite © ⑤ AUDITE21 439

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



Paillard and Münchinger

Jean-François Paillard's legacy for Erato yields an especially distinctive sound, a solid, vibrant body of tone featuring excellent soloists and fastidiously balanced recordings produced by Michel Garcin. Paillard's 1968 recording of Pachelbel's Canon (in his own notably romantic arrangement) was famously used in the 1980 film *Ordinary People*, eventually reaching the number one position in the Billboard Classical Albums chart – and it still sounds pretty lustrous, as does a slightly swifter 1983 remake which is also included in the set.

Paillard's great skill in (mostly) Baroque repertoire was his ability to generate warmth, allowing the music – whether it be a vigorous dance or something more relaxing – to glow and breathe. In fact, if you fancy jumping waist-deep into the heady orchestral environs of the 17th and 18th centuries, and don't have an aversion to modern instruments, Paillard is your ideal guide. His 1961 recording of Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks* (wind and drums) vies with Mackerras's (originally on Pye, from around the same time) for reedy splendour, whereas his strongly stated accounts of the complete Opp 3 and 6 Concerti grossi rate highly alongside those by (for example) Karl Richter (Archiv), Neville Marriner (Decca) or the more decorative Raymond Leppard (Philips/Decca). Likewise, the organ concertos (Opp 4 and 7) with Marie-Claire Alain still compare with the finest, holding their own very well in terms of sound, as does a poised set of the complete *Tafelmusik* by Telemann, with soloists that include the trumpeter Maurice André (a prominent presence throughout the collection) and violinist Gérard Jarry.

In general, **Karl Münchinger** drew a weightier body of sound from his Stuttgart CO than did Paillard from his players in Paris, though he could also inspire performances of rare beauty, as he does in the *Largo affettuoso* from Wassenauer's Concerto No 4, a warmly affectionate 4'17" compared with Paillard's more hasty 3'01". Both conductors include all six Wassenauer concertos (previously attributed to Pergolesi). I was surprised not to find Münchinger's recording of the Pachelbel –

which also scored very high sales in its day – on Eloquence's enjoyable and varied twofer 'Münchinger Miniatures', though there's much else to smile about. Eloquence describes its generous Baroque box as Münchinger's 'Baroque Legacy', which isn't quite the case on two counts: firstly, JC Bach was a Classical not a Baroque composer, as were Haydn and Beethoven (the set features the *Grosse Fuge*, 'an absolutely contemporary piece of music that will be contemporary for ever', said Stravinsky). But more importantly, key elements in Münchinger's extensive vinyl Baroque legacy for Decca that are missing include *The Art of Fugue*, alternative recordings of the Bach Orchestral Suites, three recordings of the *Brandenburg Concertos*, and Handel's *Water Music* and *Music for the Royal Fireworks*. Could there be a second volume in the offing? Knowing how on the ball Eloquence's Cyrus Meher-Homji is, I can't imagine there not being one, maybe even more.

Paillard's opening movement of Dvořák's Serenade for strings is to die for

What we do have are three beautifully transferred recordings of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, tellingly imperious to start with (1951, with Reinhold Barchet as the violin soloist), lightening somewhat in 1958 (Werner Krotzinger) then finally taking flight in 1972 (Konstanty Kulka). Paillard recorded the *Brandenburg Concertos* once and the Orchestral Suites three times, all of which find their way into Erato's comprehensive box. These performances are conceptually similar to one another, differing principally in the way the sound is balanced, gradually veering towards greater transparency. Perhaps the most telling contrasts between Münchinger and Paillard are in the canzonas of Giovanni Gabrieli, Paillard employing a sonorous blend of brass and strings, Münchinger a less striking string band with continuo.

Eloquence's box 'Karl Münchinger: The Classical Legacy' gathers together trim, meaty performances of works by Haydn

and Mozart (including various symphonies and concertos, most notably Mozart's Violin Concertos Nos 3 and 6, warmly played by Christian Ferras, and Piano Concertos Nos 9 and 15 with Wilhelm Kempff at his most delicately expressive), as well as Boccherini with a rich-toned Pierre Fournier, who also features in the Baroque collection playing Vivaldi and Couperin.

The final reckoning has to rate Erato's collection as the essential purchase, not only because of the range of composers on offer (well over a hundred, from Gabrieli to Shostakovich, though mostly Baroque) but also because of the sheer beauty of the playing. For example, the opening movement of Dvořák's Serenade for strings is to die for. Münchinger's repertoire also brings us into the 20th century, with works by Lennox Berkeley, Barber, Hindemith and Martin among the 'Münchinger Miniatures' – but although orchestras such as the Vienna Philharmonic and Suisse Romande are also featured in the Münchinger sets, viewed section for section the Stuttgart CO is less suavely polished than Paillard's chamber orchestra.

Eloquence offers attractive packaging, numerous photos, exhaustive discographical information and excellent notes by Antony Hodgson, whereas Erato's presentation is significantly below par, with a slim booklet of notes in Japanese and French only, a minimally informative index of where to find which works and gnomic recording details on the back of each 'original jacket' sleeve. Given the musical significance of the set, this is disappointing. If Erato follows its 'orchestral' set with a Paillard vocal collection, we'll need something a good deal better than this. But even having said that, 'Jean-François Paillard: The Complete Erato Orchestral and Concerto Recordings' is utterly unmissable – and inexpensive too, taken on a disc-for-disc basis.

THE RECORDINGS



The Complete Erato Orchestral and Concerto Recordings
Jean-François Paillard
Erato © (134 discs)
9029 54109-7

**Münchinger Miniatures**

Karl Münchinger
Decca Eloquence
Ⓢ Ⓜ ELQ482 6954

**The Baroque Legacy**

Karl Münchinger
Decca Eloquence
Ⓢ Ⓜ ELQ484 0160

**The Classical Legacy**

Karl Münchinger
Decca Eloquence
Ⓢ Ⓜ ELQ484 0170

Walter's pre-war Mozart

Comparing Bruno Walter's pre-war 78s of Mozart symphonic works with his Columbia SO stereo recordings highlights unexpected similarities. For instance, in No 40 in G minor (here with the Berlin Staatskapelle, 1929) Walter in both versions slams on the brakes at the close of the first movement, excludes the exposition repeat, darkens the texture at the centre of the *Andante*, eases for the Menuetto's Trio and cues an unusually urgent finale. The 1932 *Figaro* Overture with the British SO is a real sizzler, skilfully transferred (as is everything else here) by Mark Obert-Thorn. Walter as pianist-conductor (VPO) artfully winds his way through the D minor Piano Concerto as if improvising it all. But perhaps the most remarkable item is the first-ever complete recording of Mozart's Requiem, given live at the 1937 Paris Exposition with the VPO and transferred from a rare set of 78rpm vinyl pressings. Its 'dream' cast is topped by Elisabeth Schumann's bright, bird-like soprano, her every word a meld of heart and mind, and tailed by the beefy, sonorous bass of Alexander Kipnis (yes, the 'Tuba mirum' suffers a botched trombone solo, but Kipnis gallantly carries on regardless). Then there's the lovely tenor of Anton Dermota, with only contralto Kerstin Thorborg a notch or two below the others in terms of quality. The chorus is mostly good, the reading as a whole moving but valedictory. The rest of the set (recorded mainly in Vienna) includes Symphonies Nos 38, 39 and 41, *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* and some overtures and dances, all subscribing to Walter's flexible way with the composer who was surely closest to his heart.

THE RECORDING

Mozart The Pre-War Recordings
Bruno Walter
Pristine Audio Ⓢ Ⓜ PASC564

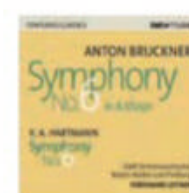


Heartfelt Mozart from Bruno Walter

Ferdinand Leitner in Bruckner and Hartmann

The Sixth has a thorny reputation for being the one Bruckner work that, from a purely interpretative standpoint, is difficult to get right. For example, in the first movement the *Tempo wie Anfangs* around the coda (at 15'08" here) too often cues an ugly increase in tempo. Not so with Ferdinand Leitner on a broadcast recording from October 1982 with the SWR SO Baden-Baden and Freiburg (previously available on a Hänssler Classic CD, with its current coupling), where the initiative is to push gently, as if picking up the tempo rather than pushing it forwards. Leitner's performance is usefully transparent, with carefully blended textures that underline how this least conventional of Bruckner symphonies most resembles its classical forebears. The first movement is surely the greatest of the four, though the *Adagio* is among the most beautiful by Bruckner, its Elgarian second subject a useful launchpad for those as yet uninitiated into the world of his symphonies.

But Bruckner's masterpiece, fine though it is, isn't the disc's principle attraction. Karl Amadeus Hartmann's two-movement Sixth Symphony (1953) is based on an earlier work after a Zola novel, its first movement echoing the romanticism of Berg and Mahler whereas the furious, semi-fugal second movement makes *The Rite of Spring* sound like the merest bagatelle by comparison. Here we have music that rages almost incessantly – skilfully orchestrated, with a thudding bass drum and mushrooming tam-tam. Scary though it undoubtedly is, this is magnificent music and the sound captures every strand of its many gnarled arguments with great clarity.

THE RECORDING

Bruckner Symphony No 6
Hartmann Symphony No 6
Ferdinand Leitner cond
SWR Music Ⓢ Ⓜ SWR19523CD

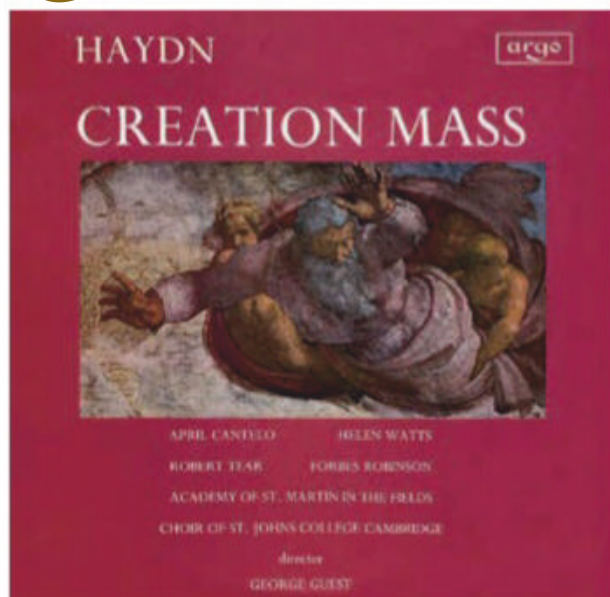
Busch and Serkin at the height of their powers

Pan back 70 years or more, prior to the current trend towards interpretative uniformity, and you could invariably identify a player – say a great violinist – after a mere four bars or so. Adolf Busch was one such individual, and Pristine's collection of six live Beethoven sonata recordings by Busch and his son-in-law playing partner Rudolf Serkin, four of them first releases, more than proves the point. Busch's signature qualities are evident right from the start: his unique style of portamento, of drawing a blossoming crescendo on a single note, his crisp *détaché* bowing in contrast with a meltingly lovely legato and, as captured in recital, his leaping spontaneity. Although rigorously classical in his overall approach, Busch could also fan the flames. The *Presto* body of the *Kreutzer* Sonata's first movement is more *presto con fuoco* than merely *presto*: no wonder the Library of Congress audience bursts into enthusiastic applause at the end of it. That performance dates from 1944, whereas two versions of Op 30 No 3 date from 1943 and 1948 respectively, both framing the central *Tempo di minuetto, ma molto moderato e grazioso* with spirited outer movements. It would be difficult to imagine a lovelier performance of the *Spring* Sonata (1937), the opening of the *Adagio molto espressivo* as mellow as anyone could wish for (beam up 3'06" and the playing is unimaginably beautiful), or the Tenth Sonata (1950), where again the *Adagio espressivo* is profoundly moving. In both sonatas the slow movements are tailed by witty Scherzos, which Busch and Serkin throw off with great aplomb. The First Sonata (1937) subscribes to the same elevated standards of performance. Apart from flawed sound in the *Kreutzer*'s second movement, the source materials are more than satisfactory and the transfers excellent. I doubt that this Beethoven year will yield a finer historic violin recital than this one.

THE RECORDING

Beethoven Violin Sonatas
Adolf Busch, Rudolf Serkin
Pristine Audio Ⓢ Ⓜ PACM104

Classics RECONSIDERED



David Threasher and **Geraint Lewis** revisit George Guest's 1968 recording of Haydn's 'Creation' Mass at St John's College, Cambridge



Haydn

'Creation' Mass

Soloists; Choir of St John's College, Cambridge; ASMF / George Guest

Argo/Decca

This record completes Argo's long-term venture of recording all the late Haydn Masses, and they are to be congratulated on making this magnificent but all-too-little-known music available.

No doubt the St John's choir is as big as the one at Eisenstadt for which Haydn wrote, but there is sometimes a tendency for choral detail to be covered by the

violins. Also the boys sound a little breathy here and there. But their innocent quality is attractive, and the singing in general is very good. The balance may favour the orchestra, but it allows us to hear a great deal of beautifully played instrumental detail, and as Haydn was wonderfully inventive over his accompaniments in his last years, there is little reason to complain. The soloists are all good, and combine beautifully in the *Benedictus*, a serenely lovely movement. In the 'Incarnatus est' Robert Tear makes his solo one of the most memorable moments in the performance.

This is magnificent music. Even the *Kyrie* is astonishingly powerful and dramatic, with high trumpet parts adding to the excitement. The Mass dates from 1801, and is known as the *Creation* Mass because Haydn starts the 'Qui tollis peccata mundi' in the *Gloria* with a brief quotation from his famous oratorio.

These late Haydn Masses contain some of his greatest music. The *Creation* Mass is well up to standard; George Guest has secured a fine performance, and the sound falls agreeably on the ears.

Roger Fiske (3/69)

Geraint Lewis The super-intelligent pianist and scholar Charles Rosen had a very mysterious blind-spot (or 'deaf-patch') when it came to Haydn's church music – similar in nature to the common criticisms of the composer's more cloth-eared contemporaries who found it too 'cheerful'. I find it fascinating, therefore, that Roger Fiske's (pre-Rosen) review of the first UK recording of this penultimate Mass – virtually unknown in 1969 – underlines his astonishment at how 'great' the music actually is! But then, I'm reminded of what Johann Adam Hiller wrote at the time on the copy he made in 1804 of this so-called *Creation* Mass: 'Opus summum viri summi Joseph Haydn'.

David Threasher I think that must have been Hiller's catchphrase – he also wrote it on his manuscript copy of Mozart's Requiem, of which he had given one of the very earliest performances, in Leipzig in 1796, four years before it was finally published. Interesting that he applied it to Haydn's last-but-one Mass and not its successor, the *Harmoniemesse* ... but then, perhaps he didn't know the later Mass!

For a work that was so well received in these pages on the appearance of its first recording of international standing, it's surprising that it's one of the least well known of the run of late sacred works – obscured by the long shadow of the ever-popular *Nelson* Mass and the *Harmoniemesse*, and I'd venture that it's appreciated less even than the *Theresienmesse* or the *Mass in Time of War*.

GL Mind you, Hiller's judgement that these were 'supreme works by supreme men' was spot-on. But the continuing neglect of this work is indeed perplexing. We have Decca to thank for the pioneering recordings of the six late Masses – and the partnership of St John's College and George Guest with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and Marriner was inspired. After the stentorian *Nelson* in 1962 at King's with the LSO, Argo went up-river and SJC started with the *Theresienmesse* in 1965, and the rest followed annually. This penultimate Mass was also the penultimate (*pace* Fiske) in the series of recordings – in 1968 – and the first of two to feature the late-lamented Stephen Cleobury in his years as Organ Scholar.

I find the warmer, clearer, more intimate sound of St John's Chapel much better suited to the scale of Haydn's intentions.

DT I've never been to the Bergkirche at Eisenstadt, where these late Masses were performed – and from the pictures it seems to bear no resemblance whatsoever to Sir George Gilbert Scott's rather more Protestant inspiration. But I imagine the two buildings must be fairly comparable in size and acoustic. And there's the 'authenticity' of having boys on the top line rather than women, so Guest's re-creation, however unwittingly, hit the nail on the head in several ways.

GL I'm not entirely sure that Haydn in 1801 did have boys as opposed to women at Eisenstadt but the 'Continental' tone that Guest cultivated at St John's has the firmer flexibility, agility and expressive vibrato that seems perfect for this music. For these boys and men the text is meaningful in that they sing it every week in term – but the recordings of these prodigious works were annual highlights each July – just as they were for the Princess Marie Hermenegild



Haydn pioneers: George Guest with the boys of St John's College, Cambridge in the chapel

Esterházy every September. What wonderful name-day presents they were!

DT I remember you hymning the *Harmoniemesse* in a *Gramophone* Collection in April 2014, and noting that at St John's you can 'virtually see the whites of their eyes'. It's a very particular sound, and one that's been audibly developed by Guest's successors – Christopher Robinson, David Hill and Andrew Nethsingha. And as the college chapel is a liturgical establishment, you feel in their performances of these Masses the meaning of the words and music as an act of devotion – an essential facet of the music that seems to elude so many other choirs and conductors. The 'choral society' approach is undoubtedly appropriate for the *Creation* Mass's namesake oratorio (a work that has never wanted for performances or recordings) but it seems misplaced in these more private works.

It strikes me, too, that among Haydn's symphonies, it's the ones with nicknames that get most attention – *Trauer*, *Farewell*, *Hen*, *Bear*, *Surprise* and so on. Nearly all the mature Masses have pictorial names but so many of them fail to catch the eye of performers. You'd imagine, with such a strong connection to the famous and much-loved *Creation*,

that this Mass would be right up there among the favourites.

GL You would – in a way. But the connection proved initially controversial. The Empress Marie Therese (the wife of Emperor Francis II, and not to be confused with the Maria Theresa who'd scolded Haydn as a choirboy in Vienna) was scandalised by the context of the quotation and demanded that it be expunged and replaced for her personal copy of the Mass! It just shows how potent a seemingly simple musical pattern can be. And Haydn is in fact playing a prank, although it is more serious than some might think. The passage in question on the horns – in the *Gloria* – comes from the penultimate number in the oratorio when Adam is conveying his love and gratitude for the presence of Eve. The line 'The dew-dropping morn, O how she quickens all!' is now set to 'Who takest away the sins of the world'. Even if Haydn is naughtily taken by some to be thinking of 'morning's glory' in an overtly lubricious sense, the real point is surely that he also conveys very tellingly that Adam and Eve were at this point in a state of prelapsarian innocence; the 'sin' of the Mass is just around the corner and not portrayed in *Die Schöpfung* until a cryptic final warning.

Haydn immediately pulls up short after the quotation and becomes appropriately pious. The Empress was wrong, I think, and missed a profound theological point which Haydn made with operatic poise and humour. His hilariously perfunctory 'correction' on chortling bassoons is his very appropriate retort to Her Imperial Majesty – despite his fondness for her and her huge admiration of his music.

DT Yes, the big Henle score has a page titled 'Änderung für die Kaiserin Marie Therese', giving the nine-bar section that Haydn rewrote for the Empress. And she clearly knew whereof she spoke, having herself sung in some fairly high-profile performances of the oratorio. It's a lovely moment, though, suddenly registering music as if it were wafting in from elsewhere – and hearing the horns as soloists for the first time in the work. You can hear the rejigged version on Richard Hickox's recording, which

I would say is a worthwhile alternative to Guest if you're after modern, digital sound – and you also get the *Missa Rorate coeli desuper* from the opposite end of Haydn's career, where he fits all the same words into a work lasting under seven minutes! There's also a recording with New York forces under Jane Glover, which compares very well. But neither, I feel, quite captures Haydn's joyful approach to his strongly held religion in quite the way Guest and the young voices of St John's do. The finest soloists of the day, too – April Cantelo (Mrs Colin Davis as was) and the magnificent Helen Watts especially, with Robert Tear bringing a lovely Italianate 'zing' to the tenor part.

GL Thank you for mentioning some great Welsh singers! They haven't really been surpassed since and this disc retains a sense of 'discovery' which transcends mere authenticity. Peter Quantrill in August 2017 referred to the 'real pathos' that SJC found in the *Benedictus* of this Mass – and it's the unalloyed sincerity of this singing that still registers today. I first heard one of these discs on radio when I was eight and I've remained ensnared by the sublime humanity of Haydn and the sheer sound of St John's to this day. 🎧

Books



Andrew Farach-Colton finds much to enjoy in a Gershwin compendium:

'Research on Gershwin's musical education establishes that he had a deeper background in classical music than had been imagined'



David Gutman welcomes a useful, slimline book on Shostakovich:

'We are subtly encouraged to dump the myths; no successful career can be maintained without compromise'

The Cambridge Companion to Gershwin

Edited by Anna Harwell Celenza

Cambridge University Press, PB, 334pp, £22.99

ISBN 978-1-108-43764-6



Because Gershwin worked so successfully in distinct genres – Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, Hollywood,

the concert hall and the nightclub – any reasonably thorough study of his output is going to be complicated. Some especially thorny issues arise, too: in his music's relationship to jazz, for example, and in the discussions that arise concerning race and prejudice when considering both his career and his legacy. It's no surprise, then, that the composer and his music have become particularly ripe subjects for scholars of a wide variety of stripes, and if this volume of the Cambridge Companion series has a serious fault, it's that it can read like a compilation of academic papers. A few of the chapters are painfully prosaic, in both their language and structural formality. That said, reading through from cover to cover reminds one that, even today, more than 80 years after his death, Gershwin remains a controversial and enigmatic figure.

I would imagine that *Gramophone* readers might not necessarily be interested in every subject covered here. There's an examination of his musical theatre scores, for instance, as well as an entry that looks at why his music has proved so appealing to jazz interpreters (the latter reads like a book-length study that's been crammed uncomfortably into a mere dozen pages). On the other hand, while I didn't think I'd be all that engrossed in the chapter 'Writing for the Big Screen', Nathan Platte's analysis is so canny it sent me scurrying off to try to view the scenes in question; I can't think of higher praise for a work of scholarship (or criticism, for that matter).

In fact, some of the most unexpected topics prove the most enlightening. Howard Pollack, author of a fine biography of Gershwin (UCP, 11/08), gives a highly concentrated overview of music history texts to demonstrate how our view of Gershwin has evolved. And Mark Clague, the editor-in-chief of a new critical edition coming out of the University of Michigan, looks at the deep connection between the composer's economic and artistic accomplishments, showing that Gershwin was not only savvy in his business dealings but displayed a nearly unflappable confidence and belief in his gifts and potential, and did so from the very outset of his career. Related to this, in a way, is Susan Neimoyer's thorough research on his musical education, which establishes that Gershwin had a deeper background in classical music than had been imagined.

Timothy Freeze's study of the works for piano and orchestra presupposes in-depth knowledge of music theory and classical forms but abounds with insight and led me to an even greater appreciation of these scores, and especially the Concerto in F (Freeze's convincing evidence that Gershwin modelled the work on Rubinstein's Fourth Concerto makes the work seem like less of an outlier). Naomi André's chapter on *Porgy and Bess*, focusing primarily on its troubling view of black culture, seems to bite off more than it can chew (not surprisingly given the complexity of the subject at hand), but as recompense there's an exceptionally edifying essay by the volume's editor, Anna Harwell Celenza, on the impact of Gershwin's travels (international and domestic) on his music, including his visit to South Carolina prior to writing *Porgy*. Celenza ties the work of Gershwin's cousin, poet and folklorist Ben Botkin, not only to the creation of his 'folk opera' (the composer's own description), but to pieces like the *Cuban Overture*.

The opening chapter by Michael Owen, exploring the composer's relationship with his parents and siblings, and how he prematurely stepped into the role of the patriarch, is similarly illuminating. And

the brief epilogue by the singer Michael Feinstein, who as a young man served as Ira Gershwin's assistant, ends the volume with something of a bang. Feinstein appears to take pleasure in debunking various beliefs and assertions, although he does this without claiming to know what's true so much as what's false, and this gives his contribution a weight that belies his delightfully breezy tone. He recounts, for example, how he introduced Michael Tilson Thomas to Gershwin's brother so the conductor/pianist could play a missing cadenza he'd written for the *Second Rhapsody*, which he was going to record. Ira enjoyed it, Feinstein recalls, but asked him not to perform or record it. Then, 15 years after Ira's death, Tilson Thomas re-recorded the work, this time with his cadenza, claiming in the booklet note that Ira had approved it. 'Since I was present at the meeting in question, I can definitively say: "It ain't necessarily so."'

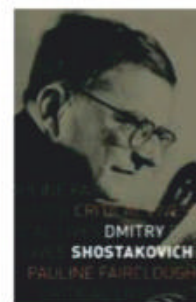
On its own, Feinstein's deft dispelling of rumour and falsehood would be worth the cost of this book. As a whole this Cambridge Companion is not as indispensable as, say, *The George Gershwin Reader* (OUP, 7/04) – a wide-ranging compilation of writing by and about Gershwin – but it's still a worthwhile addition to the ever-growing body of Gershwin studies. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Dmitry Shostakovich

By Pauline Fairclough

Reaktion Books, 192 pp, PB, £11.99

ISBN 978-1-78914-127-6



The so-called 'Shostakovich Wars' may have cooled but we are left with conflicting views, the composer

habitually portrayed as either heroic dissident or docile pragmatist with little reference to what makes his music tick. The Fifth Symphony has become a battleground of ideas. The defiant



George Gershwin: a new book gets us closer to understanding the man and musician

samizdat cryptographer of Ian MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich* (Fourth Estate: 1990) feels almost compatible with the shamefaced introvert of Julian Barnes's *The Noise of Time* (Jonathan Cape, 4/16) if only because both rely on *Testimony* (1979), the Shostakovich dossier 'as related to and edited by' Solomon Volkov. Whether or not one regards the latter as dodgy (mixing recycled material approved by the composer with apocryphal reportage inserted after his death), its publication largely put paid to the notion of an artistic endeavour independent of politics. Nothing would be less marketable than a biography of Tchaikovsky in which the vicissitudes of his personal life lose out to a disquisition on his reactionary constitutional views but Shostakovich v Stalin has become a special case. What other great composer was under state surveillance for virtually his entire adult life?

It would be unreasonable to expect definitive analysis from a monograph

hardly bigger than those fondly remembered BBC Music Guides of the 1980s but Pauline Fairclough provides lucid, no-nonsense commentary. A Bristol-based academic who has published widely on Shostakovich reception history, she pitches her stall on the fact-based, non-conjectural side of the debate without dissing conflicting ideas with the belligerence associated with a scholar such as Richard Taruskin. While no one has yet seen the composer's NKVD file, Fairclough taps previously unpublished sources along with familiar anecdotes. There's more than might be expected on the composer's womanising and alcohol dependency. Then again, what gives her slim volume its distinctive tone is the way Fairclough searches out biographical and stylistic continuities where others see only disjunctive leaps. The dutiful creator of *The Song of the Forests* (1949) has to coexist with the rigorous structural engineer of the

Fifth String Quartet (1952): both embody long-term extra-political trends in Shostakovich's development. We are subtly encouraged to dump the myths. No successful career can be maintained without compromise.

Perhaps the most controversial part of the book will be its reassessment of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, a 'negative' take that the author hopes to develop further between hard covers. For Fairclough (as for Taruskin) the fact that Stalin hated the show should not blind us to the cruelty, misogyny and party-line nature of this and other, unrealised operatic projects. Fairclough finds more positive energy in unlikely places, including the finale of the First Violin Concerto and the first movement of the Seventh String Quartet. The Eleventh, Twelfth and Thirteenth Symphonies constitute a 'civic trilogy' and she asks us to recognise the playful aspect of the Fifteenth. The Viola Sonata is seen to contain a summatory skein of self-quotation apart from the obvious Beethoven, more valedictory than bleak.

When Fairclough has nothing to go on she refrains from mere speculation. That anonymous *Pravda* editorial of 1936, 'Muddle Instead of Music', is definitively ascribed, whereas the second of Shostakovich's three marriages remains a perplexing blank. Only one error of fact. It's claimed that Sir Henry Wood gave the Western premiere of the *Leningrad* Symphony at his London Promenade Concert of June 22, 1942. That was actually the date of a studio relay undertaken before the season launched. The public unveiling at the Proms came a week later. (Given that Toscanini goes unmentioned as a contender for first-performance rights, I wonder whether a portion of text has gone missing.)

Minor weaknesses are attributable to the format of the Critical Lives series. There are six chapters framed by a preface and postlude plus modest scholarly appendages and 26 photos, many new. Some will welcome the exclusion of music examples. Names are transliterated in a consistent fashion which can however render them unrecognisable: hence Semën Bichkov. More problematic is the absence of an index. You can absorb the essentials of this elegant, often resonant study at one or two sittings but its utility as a reference tool is inevitably undermined. A well-priced starting point for newcomers, nevertheless, and a welcome supplement to Elizabeth Wilson's enthralling anthology *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (Faber, 10/94), a source plainly much trawled by Fairclough herself! **David Gutman**

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Mahler's Fourth Symphony

Naivety or knowingness? Conductors from Abbado to Zinman have offered takes on this fin de siècle masterpiece, writes **David Gutman**

In the early 1950s the ever-sceptical *Record Guide* of Edward Sackville-West and Desmond Shawe-Taylor already understood that at his best Mahler had 'achieved a final precision in the expression of nostalgia for the low ceilings, the wavering nightlight, the fields and woods, the unambiguous affections, the stilled terrors and the sharp, fleeting raptures of childhood'. Unlike most Mahler symphonies, his *fin de siècle* Fourth did not take decades to secure a place in the repertoire. Its comparative brevity and relatively modest orchestration seem to have emboldened colleagues, acolytes and their disciples to parade their insights in concert and preserve them for posterity.

Today's discography contains few significant gaps. We can only guess how Henry Wood and his first wife dealt with the British premiere at the Proms on October 25, 1905 – but we *are* able to eavesdrop on the composer himself. On November 9 Mahler was in Leipzig to set down a strangely uneven piano reduction of the finale alone for M Welte & Sohne (Dal Segno, 6/04, Accentus, 8/13 etc). Blame the piano roll mechanism or the executant for the lumps and bumps. Or could it be that Mahler's 'funny walk' – the incessant 'change of pace' recalled by musicians who played under his direction in New York – fed into his performance style? There is a sense in which **Willem Mengelberg**, live in Amsterdam at the start of the Second World War, leads the whole work this way, letting the music tell a story for which the printed score is merely the starting point. Then again, how likely is it that Mahler, a frequent guest with Mengelberg's orchestra, ever heard his friend conduct

a finished performance of his music? Mahler's metronome marks as logged by Mengelberg are by no means identical to those he himself adopted in 1939. The different priorities of Bruno Walter, Mahler's own protégé, or Otto Klemperer, least sentimental of his aides, remind us of the pitfalls of retrospectively imputing authenticity, not to mention the elusive nature of the work itself.

Compositionally speaking, the finale came first, a seemingly unassuming setting of verse from the voluminous anthology of traditional German poems, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* ('Youth's Magic Horn'). As early as February 1892 Mahler completed a setting for voice and piano of a child's naive evocation of celestial bliss to which he ascribed his own title, 'Das himmlische Leben' ('Heavenly life'). Orchestrated and performed, it remained unpublished, having been earmarked for inclusion in the Third Symphony. Later it became the goal of a new symphonic project, more explicitly journeying from complexity to simplicity, on which he worked between June 1899 and April 1901, mainly during his summer breaks. Making the song appear as the logical destination of three new symphonic movements was a challenging assignment for the composer, as it has been for his interpreters.

Mahler himself conducted the first performance in Munich on November 25, 1901. As ever the critics were bewildered. The last of his symphonic flirtations with Romantic nationalism also points the way to a texturally transparent, anti-representational art of the future. So is it an ode to youthful innocence in an increasingly industrialised world or

something more sceptical? Beethovenian archetypes abound. The slow movement seems to channel the wondrous quartet from Act 1 of *Fidelio*, one thread in the first movement is provided by a Beethoven piano concerto (No 4 in G for another No 4 in G), while Mahler's brief preamble feels indebted to the impish *Allegretto scherzando* of the Eighth Symphony. The jingling bells, evoking the jester's cap quite as much as an approaching sleigh, signal a unique synthesis of old and new.

Simon Rattle, among the first to revel in the minutiae of discontinuity, makes the flutes and sleigh bells wholly independent of the ritardando of clarinets and first violins, an oil-and-vinegar effect no longer uncommon. Mengelberg has a different agenda, applying exaggerated *Gemütlichkeit* to the first three notes of the melody in the violins as if introducing a Viennese waltz. Others smooth things over and may not notice that the main tempo is intended to differ from that of the opening vamp. With many an equivocation to follow, the narrative drifts in and out of real time.

Listeners for whom the blue skies are threatened only fleetingly by storm clouds detect a return to the old Austro-German verities: a first movement with clear-cut themes developed and restated in sonata form, followed by a scherzo, slow movement and upbeat (albeit sung) finale. Mahler's sound world can retain generalised Schubertian warmth or usher in the new century with a more manicured sonic palette. And what to make of the squeaky-clean precision nowadays mysteriously associated with period practice? When the composer indicates a string glissando we cannot say whether these should be slightly enlarged portamentos or something more 'modern': long, even slides which call attention to themselves like fingernails on a blackboard rather than confirming the direction of travel.

Each movement brings its technical challenges. The second was inspired by Freund Hein, a Death-surrogate and alternative Pied Piper from German folklore. Here the leader is required to tune the violin a whole tone higher than usual, the uneasy *scordatura* conveying, for Norman Lebrecht, 'a migrant threat to sedate society'. Where an ensemble as a whole has reverted to gut strings it can make sense to give the depiction of Freund Hein a literally metallic core. The third movement, peculiarly affecting, is not all divine serenity, its 'accelerating' dancelike variations as difficult to pace as the emotive throwing open of the gates of Paradise is tough to pitch (intonationally

Heiter Schaglich; anmuthig bewegt.

Handwritten musical score for a symphony orchestra, featuring parts for Flöte, Oboe, Clarinette, Fagott, Horn, Violin I and II, Viola, Cello, and Contrabasso. The score is written on ten staves with various musical notations, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'p' and 'pp'.



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Sleigh bells ring: the opening page of Mahler's autograph score of the Fourth Symphony

and interpretatively). Audiovisual formats parade other variables, from the unfathomable variety of sleigh bells and seating plans to the sartorial presentation of the soloist and her arrival on stage.

'Who have you cast for the soprano solo?' asked Mahler in 1904. 'She must be capable of singing with a naive, childlike expression, and with particularly good diction!' Solutions come in all shapes and sizes. **Leonard Bernstein's** first, 1960 recording, curiously denied a separate release in the UK, was a breakthrough for Reri Grist, an unaffected artist just emerging from music theatre (expressly *West Side Story*). In preparing for his third version (DG, 8/88) Bernstein was seduced by the plainer sound of the boy treble. Those who consider the experiment doomed to failure should seek out Anton Nanut's contemporaneous Ljubljana account (Stradivari Classics). His remarkably assured boy soprano, strong and true (and uncredited on some reissues) is Max Emanuel Cencic, today a renowned countertenor. Back in 1968 Maurice Abravanel could count on a Vanguard label stablemate, the polyglot Soviet-born Israeli soprano Netanya Davrath. As in Canteloube's *Chants d'Auvergne* so here her silvery, folk-like timbre is unsullied by excessive vibrato, while the breezy tempo is not far off Mahler's (even if that was designed for domestic consumption).

Canny indeed those with the foresight to preserve future stars in their early prime. Even in 1970 Margaret Price was not perhaps a 'natural' for childlike wonder yet her glorious, firm singing raises to another level what now seems a rather penny-plain traversal from **Jascha Horenstein's** LPO. The young Kathleen Battle, almost too creamy, complements the *Sachertorte* of Lorin Maazel's Viennese reading. Juliane Banse copes admirably with impatience –



The hut in which Mahler (top) composed much of the Fourth

Pierre Boulez in Cleveland (DG, 5/00) – and inertia – Giuseppe Sinopoli in Dresden (Profil, 8/08).

Close microphone placement can spoil the recipe. Sylvia McNair, vocally ideal,

sounds constrained rather than intimate in Berlin with Bernard Haitink (Philips, 2/94). By contrast, Lisa Della Casa for Fritz Reiner (RCA, 8/60) reaches us as if from the far side of an Alpine valley.

Nor is she always in tune. Singers conventionally defined as mezzos, on paper unsuited to the task, have sometimes triumphed. Dodgiest are the celebrity sopranos doing mid- or late-career star turns. Fining down her voice only to be defeated by the German text is the unlikeliest of them all, the great Galina Vishnevskaya, with David Oistrakh on the podium in 1967 (Russian Revelation, 6/97).

The first Fourth, the earliest electrical recording of any (almost) complete Mahler symphony, was made in Japan in May 1930. Viscount Hidemaro Konoye and his New Symphony Orchestra (precursor of today's NHK Symphony Orchestra) were joined by soprano Eiko Kitazawa in Tokyo's Parlophone Studio. As transferred to CD (Denon, 6/88), this is a curio rather than a contender. Best known in the West

for recording the *Horst Wessel Song* with the Berlin Philharmonic and declining to perform Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem*, Konoye is understandably cautious. There's a major cut at the heart of the slow movement and the last three bars of the finale exceeded the capacity of the original 78rpm side.

In his widely distributed New York set **Bruno Walter** hurries those two movements along, apparently in keeping with an interpretation lighter and more linear than Mengelberg's. With an overall timing of 49'21" this is the shortest Mahler Fourth; the longest, clocking in at 65'05", is Wyn Morris's (Collins Classics, 11/89). That the limitations of the medium

inhibited the message is supported by the recollections of Walter's soloist Dési Halban. Preserved in wiry sound, Walter's 1950 Salzburg Festival performance

HISTORIC CHOICE

Vincent; Concertgebouw Orch / Mengelberg

Pristine Audio (M) PASCO55

A conductor with god-like status before blotting his copybook in the Second World War, Mengelberg imposes seemingly



eccentric nuances on a timbrally distinctive band the composer knew well. The interpretation may or may not be modelled on Mahler's own.

CHILL-OUT CHOICE

Battle; VPO / Maazel

Sony Classical (S) (10) 88985 38136-2

Maazel, at his most relaxed, lets the Vienna Philharmonic do its thing while soprano Kathleen Battle does hers. While some



will deem the results insufficiently Grimm (*sic*), there's nothing transatlantic about the music-making and the exquisite details show that no one is coasting.

AUDIOVISUAL CHOICE

Kožená; Lucerne Fest Orch / Abbado

EuroArts (E) (DVD) 205 7988

The audiovisual winner finds Abbado near the end of his career coaxing a performance



of chamber-like delicacy from the world's classiest citizen-of-nowhere scratch band. The filming may not be perfect but the players actually smile and what a luxury to have some silence at the end!

(53'55") goes deeper and benefits from the seductive presence of Irmgard Seefried. Ragged entries indicate that the music was none too familiar, yet at a time of political uncertainty and economic privation the audience was reportedly in tears at the end.

Insofar as it existed, the Mahler tradition was strongest in Holland. Post-Mengelberg renditions by Paul van Kempen with Hilversum forces for Telefunken in 1950 and Edward van Beinum with the Concertgebouw Orchestra (Decca, 10/52) have been digitised by Pristine Audio. The Concertgebouw retains its distinctive sound, the first movement moving forwards at Mengelberg's vigorous basic tempo but without his hair-raising bar-by-bar rubato. Fresh openness distinguishes **Benjamin Britten's** Aldeburgh Festival relay. The eager, lean-sounding LSO of 1961, measured in the slow movement, is frisky elsewhere. Technical mishaps demonstrate that this is live and unedited. John Barbirolli finds more shadow in a fallible BBC Symphony Orchestra broadcast from a behind-the-Iron-Curtain tour (BBC Legends, 4/99). Although Heather Harper has a more appropriate timbre than Britten's Joan Carlyle and unlike her never gets lost, she can't quite make us believe in Barbirolli's lethargic pacing.

Otto Klemperer, the last of Mahler's intimate colleagues to set down a studio rendition, is a different kind of heavyweight. Ungenial in the first movement, he convinces in the second with his ponderous characterisation of the Austrian-sounding Trio. Then again, his *Poco adagio* moves too fast for ineffable serenity. Winds are typically left unblended rather than coasting on a cushion of strings. We cannot know whether these traits were present in the 1912 Hamburg rendering with which he made his professional concert-hall debut. One unlikely admirer is Yevgeny Svetlanov (CdM, 3/97), persuaded to opt (against type) for the same kind of literalism. Klemperer's 1961 recording has tended to eclipse the Philharmonia's earlier effort under Paul Kletzki (Columbia, 7/58), where the principal horn is Dennis Brain and the soloist Emmy Loose. Klemperer has the more marketable Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, anything but artless.

By now **Leonard Bernstein** had entered the fray, redefining what 'Mahlerian' might mean for a new generation in the US: a roller-coaster ride in which schmaltz and irony are seen as essential components of the style rather than lapses of taste. The neurotic tone (and jumpier transitions) might be thought to run counter to the Fourth's classical temper, the slow movement touching rather than unduly



Magdalena Kožená is fidgety and Claudio Abbado fragile in a 2009 Lucerne performance

relaxed. More satisfying is Bernstein's audiovisual account from Vienna, 1972; Edith Mathis evokes heaven with lovely tone and a twinkle in her eye which is distinct from self-conscious 'knowingness'.

Bernard Haitink had a special affection for this score, amassing as many as seven commercial recordings with various ensembles. Some of those could do with a bit more of the weightless élan of his earliest outing with what is still recognisably van Beinum's band (Philips, 10/68). In a fondly remembered Christmas Mahler broadcast from 1982, Haitink encourages the Amsterdam players to give

of their best and is notably well served by soloist Maria Ewing, every aspect of whose presentation rings true. The film stock has faded but how fascinating to see as well as hear **Klaus Tennstedt** in 1977. His marionette-like stance is Furtwänglerish, the music's unfolding more obviously German even when the orchestra is the Boston Symphony. Lucia Popp graces his audio-only alternative (EMI, 4/83). **George Szell's** Cleveland version, scrupulously prepared and long top-rated, has comparable Teutonic density.

With Mahler becoming mainstream, non-specialist conductors were encouraged

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1939 Jo Vincent; Concertgebouw Orch / Mengelberg	Philips (M) 426 108-2 (4/86 ^R); Pristine Audio (M) PASCO55
1945 Dési Halban; New York PO / Walter	Naxos (B) 8 110876; Sony Classical (S) 7 88691 92010-2 (9/46 ^R , 7/73 ^R)
1950 Irmgard Seefried; VPO / Walter	Orfeo (F) C818 101B
1960 Reri Grist; New York PO / Bernstein	Sony Classical (S) 12 88697 94333-2 (10/71 ^R)
1961 Elisabeth Schwarzkopf; Philh Orch / Klemperer	EMI/Warner Classics (S) 6 248398-2 (7/62 ^R)
1961 Joan Carlyle; LSO / Britten	ICA Classics (S) (20 discs) ICAB5141 (4/99 ^R)
1965 Judith Raskin; Cleveland Orch / Szell	Sony Classical (S) (106 discs) 88985 47185-2 (8/67 ^R , 11/18)
1968 Elsie Morison; Bavarian RSO / Kubelík	DG (S) (10 + 483 5656GM11 (12/68 ^R , 8/75 ^R)
1968 Netanya Davrath; Utah SO / Abravanel	Vanguard (F) ATMCD1212; Musical Concepts (S) 10 MC182
1970 Margaret Price; LPO / Horenstein	EMI/Warner Classics (S) 16 608985-2 (5/71 ^R , 7/84 ^R)
1972 Edith Mathis; VPO / Bernstein	DG (M) 2 073 4090GH2; (B) 9 073 4088GH9 (2/06)
1977 Phyllis Bryn-Julson; Boston SO / Tennstedt	ICA Classics (F) ICAD5072
1982 Maria Ewing; Concertgebouw Orch / Haitink	Arthaus (F) 109 108; (F) 109 109
1983 Kathleen Battle; VPO / Maazel	Sony Classical (S) 10 88985 38136-2 (3/85 ^R , 1/86 ^R)
1988 Christine Whittlesey; SWR SO / Gielen	SWR Music (S) (17 + SWR19042CD (6/18)
1997 Amanda Roocroft; CBSO / Rattle	Warner Classics (S) 12 9029 58691-7 (6/98 ^R)
2003 Laura Claycomb; San Francisco SO / Tilson Thomas	SFS Media (F) SFS0004 (7/04); (B) 17 SFS0039
2005 Anu Koms; Stuttgart RSO / Norrington	SWR Music (M) SWR19524CD (10/06 ^R)
2008 Miah Persson; Budapest Fest Orch / I Fischer	Channel Classics (F) CCSSA26109 (4/09)
2009 Magdalena Kožená; Lucerne Fest Orch / Abbado	EuroArts (F) 205 7988; (F) 205 7984 (2/11)
2012 Christina Landshamer; Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch / Chailly	Accentus (F) ACC20257; (F) ACC10257 (8/13)
2016 Sofia Fomina; LPO / Jurowski	LPO (M) LPO0113 (9/19)
2016 Hanna-Elisabeth Müller; Düsseldorf SO / A Fischer	AVI-Music (F) AVI8553378 (1/17)

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No weak links: Miah Persson with the Budapest Festival Orchestra under Iván Fischer

to undertake one-off LPs or even complete cycles. Those pinning for saturated string sonority can turn to Herbert von Karajan's first Mahler symphony recording (DG, 11/79). André Previn's sole Mahler disc (EMI, 9/79), highly regarded by some despite a wayward first movement, has more excitable (Pittsburgh) horns and brass. Likewise Georg Solti's very present Chicagoans (Decca, 7/84). James Levine (RCA, 10/75), Franz Welser-Möst (EMI, 12/88) and Colin Davis (RCA, 7/96) excel in profound and variously drawn-out readings of the slow movement.

Lorin Maazel managed three recordings, the finest arriving during an otherwise lacklustre 1980s cycle. Devotees of the Vienna Philharmonic appreciate the wistful style, the slowly unspooling phrases. Even his sleigh bells sound mellow. The Scherzo is just unsettling enough. Maazel offers nothing galvanic, nothing remotely casual either. Close to him in mood is **Michael Tilson Thomas** in San Francisco, where superb orchestral playing is flattered by sound recording of hitherto unmatched sophistication. From the Mengelberg-style opening, MTT inhabits a dreamworld one is reluctant to leave. Does it matter that the refined torpor is almost certainly remote from anything Mahler intended, beauty standing in for truth?

The boom continues unabated. Valery Gergiev has releases targeting three discrete constituencies (LSO, 5/10; C Major, 8/11; Münchner Philharmoniker, 11/17). None offers the bucolic poetry of **Rafael Kubelík's**

Bavarian Radio forces in 1968. A Bohemian composer-conductor more lightly Germanised than Mahler himself, Kubelík first heard the Symphony under Alexander Zemlinsky in Prague in the early 1930s and directs it in almost chamber-like fashion. The breezy, unaffected quality which doesn't quite pass muster in Mahler's more gargantuan scores succeeds here. Insofar as Kubelík has heirs, they are Hungarian-born. Working in Düsseldorf, **Adám Fischer** nonetheless preserves that open-air feeling, more self-conscious in the moulding of detail as might be expected by 2016, still very persuasive. Younger brother **Iván Fischer**, whose expressive reach and dynamic range are wider, has the advantage of the Budapest Festival Orchestra and the ideal soprano for his zesty yet easeful finale. With Miah Persson invoking St Martha, it's as if we're transported to a small village church (fig 10), the organ made tangible in the exquisite treatment of the accompanying instrumental texture. Arriving at St Ursula's laugh (fig 14), her descending glissando is so perfectly matched with that of the first violins that it takes the breath away. There are no weak links and the surround sound will delight audiophiles.

Other contemporary options include an 'authenticist' lobby whose antipathy to string vibrato brings a certain glassiness to sustained music. Philippe Herreweghe (PHI, 2/11) is less doctrinaire in this respect than **Roger Norrington**, who deploys his modern instruments with a close-miked brightness complemented by Anu Komsis's

detailed, pre-school characterisation. Of the 'modernists', **Michael Gielen** betters Boulez, albeit with a weaker soloist.

Standing slightly apart are **Riccardo Chailly** and **Claudio Abbado**. Chailly tapped into Mengelberg's local legacy for his Mahler series with the now 'Royal' Concertgebouw (Decca, 4/00). More recently he has presented a tautened rethink in sound and vision, the best recorded and packaged in its class. In Leipzig everything is bright and immediate. Christina Landshamer delivers her child's-eye view of the afterlife in a glamorous grown-up's turquoise frock. Abbado is a subtler, silkier musician whose four versions chart his quest for collegial ways to make music. What sounds like choppiness in Vienna, with Frederica von Stade only theoretically miscast (DG, 6/78), feels appropriately agile with the Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester in 2006 (EuroArts) and hyper-sensitive in Lucerne in 2009. Some will avert their eyes from the fidgety antics of Magdalena Kožená and the fragility of the ailing maestro, conducting without a stick (save when rehearsal footage is ineptly spliced in). The hall is on the dry side.

Dozens of major recordings from Abbado in Berlin to Zinman in Zurich haven't had a mention (and no one makes the finale's initial muted cellos sound more like cattle lowing than Zinman). The evidence nonetheless suggests that rising playing standards don't necessarily guarantee the twilit atmospherics – which is where we came in. If you've read this far you'll be looking for something beyond the sheer competence of **Vladimir Jurowski** and his peers in a library choice, that special spark which Iván Fischer so deftly delivers. Abbado may magic more instantaneous rapture at the start of the slow movement but no 21st-century rival so skilfully squares the circle of neoclassical modernity and old-world charm. Fischer is at once crystalline and 'retro', recalibrating Mengelberg's interventionism for our own time. **G**

LIBRARY CHOICE

Persson; Budapest Festival Orch / I Fischer

Channel Classics  CCSSA26109

Though every detail is burnished into enchantment, Fischer manages to avoid a stage-managed effect. The slow music never lacks profundity, nor does the



line flag when the argument needs to press on. Perfect singing, perfect playing, spontaneous-sounding rubato and state-of-the-art sound.

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream where you want, when you want

Komische Oper Berlin & live on Operavision (free to view)

January 25

The Jewish-Czech composer Jaromír Weinberger's operetta, *Frühlingsstürme* ('Spring Storms'), was the Weimar Republic's last operetta, its January 1933 premiere taking place just 10 days before the National Socialists seized power. Furthermore, it hasn't been staged since, meaning that Barrie Kosky's new production for Berlin's Komische Oper sounds thoroughly fascinating. Plot-wise, it's a comedy set in the middle of the Japanese-Russian war of 1904-05, its gags coming by means of elements such as Japanese spies disguised as Chinese in the headquarters of the Russian army command, and a German reporter who tells corny jokes. Musically you can expect night music, musical exoticism and lyrical melodies. Scoring-wise, what you're hearing is a brand new, entire reconstruction, the original having gone missing. **Jordan de Souza** conducts a cast featuring **Stefan Kurt**, **Alma Sadé**, **Vera-Lotte Boecker**, **Dominik Köninger** and **Tanel Akzeybek**.
komische-oper-berlin.de; operavision.eu

Wigmore Hall, London & online

January 26 onwards

A reminder that all of Wigmore Hall's season-long Beethoven exploration is being audio live-streamed and made available in perpetuity on its streaming service. This month catch **Trio Shaham Erez Wallfisch**, the pianists **Jonathan Biss** (whose Beethoven talks are also being made available for streaming) and **Cédric Tiberghien**, and the violinist **James Ehnes** with the pianist **Andrew Armstrong**.
wigmore-hall.org.uk

Rose Studio, Lincoln Center & online (free to view)

February 6

As Beethoven chamber fixes go this month, we think this one from the **Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center** is one of the most tempting around: cellist **Paul Watkins** and pianist **Alessio Bax** presents all five of the composer's sonatas for cello and piano in one sitting.
chambermusicsociety.org/watch-and-listen

Latvian National Opera & live on Operavision (free to view)

January 31

Another operatic option this month that's anything but run-of-the-mill is **Imants Kalniņš's**

ARCHIVE DOCUMENTARY REVIEW

Meet three players of the Berliner Philharmoniker 'off duty'



'The Berliner Philharmoniker and their instruments'

If I were asked to name as many players from a single orchestra as possible, I'd almost certainly do best if the ensemble were the Berliner Philharmoniker, not just because so many of its players have thriving solo careers, but also thanks to the Digital Concert Hall. A lovely feature of this enterprising site is the series of little portrait films (free to view), directed by Sibylle Strobel and Torben Jacobsen, each focusing on a different player.

Recent additions include the viola player **Amihai Grosz**, the violinist **Laurentius Dinca** and the bassoonist **Markus Weidmann**. **Grosz**, who joined the orchestra in 2010, recalls his youth in Jerusalem and how, as a hyperactive kid, the minute a violin was placed in his hands, he calmed down and was 'in peace'.

He's a wonderful player – listening to him in clips of the Mozart *Sinfonia concertante*, playing his gorgeous Gasparo da Salò instrument, sent me straight off to the complete concert under Rattle. There's also an engaging sense of wonder when he talks about making music: 'You learn your soul in a way every time you play.'

Laurentius Dinca joined the Berlin Phil in 1984, thus has played under **Karajan**, **Abbado**, **Rattle** and **Petrenko**, and needless to say has much to say, particularly about his hair-raising audition for **Karajan** when he had to play **Richard Strauss's** *Don Juan* out front alongside the maestro. He plays a **Guarnerius** instrument, and it sounds very fine when **Dinca** performs with his string quintet.

Markus Weidmann, also a keen amateur photographer, talks engagingly about the mechanics of the bassoon and how the reeds are chosen and cut. He also plays the contrabassoon which, I suspect for the bulk of us, is not an instrument we know much about. His love for the bassoon is palpable and he plays superbly. **James Jolly**
Concerts available via various subscription packages to the Digital Concert Hall, from seven days (€9.90) or one month (€14.90) to 12 months (€149), at digitalconcerthall.com

1977 setting of the Latvian playwright **Rainis's** 1916 theatre piece, *I Played, I Danced*, which merges Latvian mythology with the political issues of the time to tell the story of a witty vagabond and bard, **Tots**, who travels to the underworld to bring back his bride **Lelde**, and who on the way transforms the realms of the dead, the living and himself. **Kalniņš's** elaborate and wildly energetic musical language is equally full of folkloric influence, while this new production by **Laura Groza-Ķibere** explores whether the opera's story itself remains relevant to present-day Latvia. **Mārtiņš Ozoliņš** conducts.
operavision.eu

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden & live in cinemas worldwide

January 31

Richard Jones's spectacular staging of **Puccini's** *La bohème* returns to the Covent

Garden stage under the baton of **Emmanuel Villaume**. **Sonya Yoncheva** sings **Mimi** and **Rudolfo** is sung by **Charles Castronovo**. Other cast members include **Andrzej Filonczyk** as **Marcello** and **Aida Garifullina** as **Musetta**.
roh.org.uk/showings

Metropolitan Opera, New York & cinemas worldwide

February 1

Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* returns to the New York Met's stage in **James Robinson's** production set on Catfish Row on the Charleston waterfront. **David Robertson** conducts, with two big stars – **Eric Owens** and **Angel Blue** – taking up the title-roles. Additional cast members include **Golda Schultz**, **Latonia Moore**, **Denyce Graves**, **Frederick Ballentine** and **Alfred Walker**.
metopera.org

Gothenburg Concert Hall & live on GSO Play (free to view)

February 6

The conductor **Leopold Hager** proved last season with the **Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra** that you're never too old to make a debut, because he did so at the grand age of 84. Now he's back with an Austrian-themed programme 'With Mozart to the Stars' and another artist making his GSO debut but this time who's at entirely the opposite end of the age spectrum: 19-year-old Swedish violinist **Johan Dalene**, a the BBC New Generation Artist. Mozart's Violin Concerto No 3 opens, followed by Bruckner's Symphony No 4. gso.se

Staatsoper, Munich & STAATSOPER.TV (free to view)

February 7

Rather than pairing Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* with another one-act operatic or vocal work, the Bavarian State Opera has decided to precede it with someone else in the *Bluebeard* vein: the Concerto for Orchestra, which Bartók wrote over 30 years later when he arrived in the USA, but for which he borrowed the opera's motifs. The opera, in Katie Mitchell's production, stars **John Lundgrun** as Bluebeard and **Nina Stemme** as Judith. **Oksana Lyniv** conducts. staatsoper.de

Cologne Philharmonie & live on Takt1

February 11 onwards

François-Xavier Roth and Cologne's **Gürzenich Orchestra** are touring Europe this month with the pianist **Pierre-Laurent Aimard** and a programme featuring choreography by Jörg Weinöhl which pairs music by Beethoven with works by 20th- and 21st-century

composers John Cage, Helmut Lachenmann and Bernd Alois Zimmermann, and also the premieres of works by Francesco Filidei and Isabel Mundry. UK music lovers can catch it at London's Royal Festival Hall on February 21. guerzenich-orchester.de/de/programm/allein-freyheit/652; Takt1.com; southbankcentre.co.uk

Philharmonie, Luxembourg & Takt1

February 13

The violinist **Patricia Kopatchinskaja** is the star of the show for this concert by the **Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg** under the baton of **Gustavo Gimeno**. Ravel's *Tzigane* opens their programme – always a fun and rather quirky experience with Kopatchinskaja – followed by a brand new Violin Concerto from Francisco Coll. Bruckner's Symphony No 4 then concludes the concert. philharmonie.lu; takt1.com

Barbican, London & ARTE television

February 13

One of the highlights of the **London Symphony Orchestra's** Beethoven 250 programming sees **Sir Simon Rattle** conduct Beethoven's rarely heard oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* – which is also being recorded for LSO Live – followed by a tour to Hamburg, Baden Baden, Bonn and Luxembourg. The vocal soloists joining the orchestra and chorus are **Elsa Dreisig**, **Pavol Breslik** and **David Soar**. The work is paired with Berg's Violin Concerto played by **Lisa Batiashvili**. iso.co.uk; arte.tv

Opera Ghent & Operavision VoD (free to view)

February 14

Opera Ballet Vlaanderen's production of Dvořák's *Rusalka* finished last month, and now

it arrives on Operavision for on-demand viewing. Norwegian director and choreographer **Alan Lucien Øyen's** staging is well worth catching too, because he has acknowledged the opera's many Czech folk dance rhythms by giving a central role to dance. **Giedrė Šlekytė** conducts a cast of singers and dancers headed up by **Pumeza Matshikiza** singing the title-role while **Shelby Williams** dances it. The Prince is sung by **Kyungho Kim** and danced by **Morgan Lugo**, Vodník the water goblin is sung by **Goderdzi Janelidze** and danced by **Matt Foley**, and the witch Ježibaba is sung by **Maria Riccarda**. operavision.eu

Leeds Grand Theatre & live on Operavision (free to view)

February 21

Alessandro Talevi's chilling production of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* visits Opera North this month, beginning in Leeds where this Operavision livestream comes from. **Leo McFall** conducts a tempting-looking cast comprises **Nicholas Watts** as Peter Quint/Prologue, **Sarah Tynan** as the Governess, **Eleanor Jennis** as Miss Jessel, **Heather Shipp** as Mrs Grose and **Jennifer Clark** as Flora. operavision.eu; operanorth.co.uk

Zipper Hall, Colburn School, Los Angeles & live online (free to view)

February 22, 2020

This chamber recital sees the return of Colburn School alumni violinist **William Hagen** and **Albert Cano Smit** (winner of the 2017 Walter W Naumburg Piano Competition) for a performance to include Stravinsky's *Suite Italienne* and Divertimento, and Prokofiev's Second Violin Sonata. colburnschool.edu/livestream/

ARCHIVE OPERA REVIEW

Daníel Bjarnason conducts the Iceland Symphony Orchestra in the first production in Iceland of his opera Brothers



Bjarnason

Daníel Bjarnason's opera based on Susanne Bier's film *Brothers* was commissioned and first produced, in this

production by Kasper Holten, at Den Jyske Opera in Aarhus, Denmark. It was immediately picked up by the opera company in Bjarnason's home country (as seen here, the first run conducted by the composer) and is already being staged elsewhere.

As with Bier's film, it's best watched without prior knowledge of the plot. Suffice it to say, it's a very Nordic emotional affair in which past trauma wreaks present havoc. We see little of the war in Afghanistan, but much of domestic family life in Denmark for a soldier who was sent there, witnessed unimaginable horrors and made it home alive (just).

'Protect yourself with forgetfulness' sings Bjarnason's ever-present chorus,

which is used fully and thrillingly throughout, never more so than when it joins in a tense ensemble for the principles at the opera's emotional climax. The English words are set clearly and the cast makes every one count. Bjarnason's fingerprints are all over the score, particularly in his use of chorale and passacaglia as devices, but there is a sense of the slow, heaving Icelandic music of current fashion weighing down the tragedy even before it has begun to take hold. Holten's production is thrifty but effective and the principals respond, particularly Oddur Arnþór Jónsson who is utterly convincing as the lead, Michael.

Andrew Mellor

[Watch for free at operavision.eu](http://operavision.eu) until June 12

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THIS MONTH

An exceptional two-box CD player from an unexpected source, a 'true wireless' headphone bargain, and paying tribute to a hi-fi legend.

Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

FEBRUARY TEST DISCS



This captivating programme of unfamiliar Nordic music for the oboe, played by Trygve Aarvik, is captured with excellent detail by LAWO Classics.



Vibrant and exciting from the very first notes, this Aliud release of Schildt's organ music is demonstration-quality throughout.

A famous name revived – and £330k speakers

However you listen to your music, there's something for everyone in the latest hi-fi arrivals

There's quite expensive, there's very expensive and then there's the Wilson Audio Chronosonic XVX **1**. Just arrived in the UK from its manufacturer in the US, this £330,000-a-pair loudspeaker isn't even the company's flagship model: it's a more affordable version of company founder Dave Wilson's WAMM Master Chronosonic, which currently sells for \$850,000/pr. Daryl Wilson, now carrying on his late father's work, has developed the XVX version, drawing on the original but implementing some of the technology in a simplified form. The imposing speakers stand 1.87m tall and each weighs over 310kg, using a total of seven drivers per channel including 12.5 and 10.5in woofers, two mid-range units and a pair of tweeters, each in its own enclosure. The whole speaker is adjustable to angle the drivers towards the listener for the optimal sound and can even be switched from rear-venting bass loading to front-venting to suit the room in which the speakers are used. The Chronosonic XVX comes in a wide range of standard and custom finishes, with WilsonGloss Premium Pearl finish available as a further option.

Rather more affordable is Denon's slimline DHT-S216 soundbar, its first with DTS Virtual:X 3D surround processing built in **2**. Just 6cm tall and 89cm wide, it has an HDMI input for TV sound plus optical digital and analogue inputs, and can play music from portable devices via Bluetooth. Available now, it sells for £199.

Also new from Denon is a range of wireless speakers called Denon Home **3**. Designed around the



company's HEOS multiroom technology, the range is said to combine 'clean, modern industrial design with cutting-edge technology and the benefit of 110 years of Denon audio refinement'. As well as HEOS, the speakers feature Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music HD, TIDAL, TuneIn, Deezer and more via Wi-Fi, AirPlay 2 and Bluetooth. The entry-level model is the £219 Home 150, which has a 25mm tweeter and 9cm woofer, with a separate power amp for each, while the stereo Home 250, at £449, has two 19mm tweeters and two 10cm bass units, plus a 13.5cm bass radiator, all driven by four amplifiers. The flagship Home 350, at £599, has the same tweeters as the 250 plus two 5cm mid-range drivers and a pair of 16.5cm woofers, plus six amplifiers. It also has six Quick Select buttons for favourite internet radio stations; the 150 and 250 have three. The three new models are available in black or white.

While Rotel has been with us for almost 60 years, for many of those in conjunction with Bowers & Wilkins, its Michi line of high-end models, first launched back in the 1990s, has been absent from the range for many years. Now Michi is back, with an all-new range of amplification comprising a pre-amplifier plus mono and stereo power amps, and incorporating typical Rotel touches including custom transformers,

slit-foil capacitors and carefully selected audio components. The £3299 P5 pre-amplifier has both balanced and unbalanced analogue inputs and outputs and a range of digital inputs feeding dual AKM 32-bit digital-to-analogue converters, with decoding for MQA files **4**. There's also Bluetooth and a moving coil/moving magnet phono stage, and the various sections of the pre-amp are powered by 17 independent voltage regulators, fed from two transformers of custom design and in-house construction. The S5 stereo amplifier and M8 monobloc are £5399 apiece and are powered by twin 2200VA toroidal transformers via 188,000µF of storage capacitors, each amplifier using 32 high-current output devices. These allow the S5 to deliver 500Wpc into 8 ohms or 800Wpc into 4 ohms, while the M8 is capable of 1080W into 8 ohms and 1800W into 4 ohms. All three products feature high-resolution front panel displays, and RS232 and Ethernet connections for simplified integration in custom installations.

Finally, a new high-end personal music player from Astell&Kern. The £1295 SA700 **5** takes its design cues from the company's 2013 AK120 but features state-of-the-art audio engineering, with a dual DAC design using AKM AK4492ECB converters to deliver compatibility with file formats up to 384kHz/32-bit PCM and native DSD playback all the way to DSD256/11.2MHz. The player has a 720x1080-pixel touchscreen, a steel body designed to make on-handed operation easy and 128GB of internal storage, expandable to 512GB using microSD memory. **6**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Pro-Ject CD Box RS2 T and Pre Box RS2 Digital

Best known for its part in the vinyl revival and a range of record players, the Austrian-based company has launched a two-box CD player – and it's done things the hard way

For most hi-fi enthusiasts, the Pro-Ject name is synonymous with record players. Based in Austria and founded in 1991, the company built itself on its original Pro-Ject 1 turntable and now has models ranging from the £159 Primary E all the way up to the £8000 Signature 12. What's more, central to the company legend is the factory in which the company's turntables are made, in Litovel, to the south-east of Prague in the Czech Republic.

However, alongside the success of its record player operation – not to mention the sheer scale of both the range and the scale on which it manufactures – the company has developed parallel businesses. This part started when it launched an inexpensive phono pre-amplifier to allow its turntables to be used with amplifiers having only line-level inputs; and from this original 'Phono Box', hundreds of thousands of which have been sold, sprang a line-up now running to some 60 products including digital, amplification and source components. These are divided into strata, with the C and E lines at the entry level and the RS and RS2 ranges at the top end.

Very much the flagships of this 'Box Design' range are the recently launched CD Box RS2 T CD transport and the Pre Box RS2 Digital, combining the functions of digital-to-analogue converter, headphone amp and pre-amp, thus enabling it to be used directly into power amps such as the company's Amp Box RS model or a pair of its Amp Box RS monos.

Several things set the new transport and DAC/pre apart. First, they combine high-end aspirations with the same compact

form-factor – just 20.6cm wide – as the other Pro-Ject 'box' products; second, their pricing sets them above the company's other models, at £2150 for the transport and £1750 for the DAC; and third, the company has aimed high with the engineering, rather than merely depending on off-the-shelf solutions.

Take, for example, the RS2 T transport. Have a look at the pictures and you'll search in vain for a slot into which to post your discs – this is a top-loading player, with the drive mechanism revealed when

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PRO-JECT PRE BOX RS2 DIGITAL

Type DAC/pre-amp/headphone amp

Price £1750

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Outputs RCA/balanced XLR, headphones

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with StreamUnlimited, with which it has also worked on network audio products. Founder Heinz Lichtenegger describes the enterprise as involving an investment of millions of euros and expresses his confidence that this mechanism will find its way into other manufacturers' products, including those considerably more expensive than the RS2 T.

Pro-Ject has aimed high with the engineering of this pairing, rather than merely depending on off-the-shelf solutions

This 'Blue Tiger' CD mechanism draws on the expertise of engineers formerly with the now-closed Vienna-based Philips CD development team. It uses the StreamUnlimited CD-Pro 8 with its integrated CD-84 servo, the whole assembly being mounted in a proprietary anti-vibration suspension using dampers mounted on its carbon fibre chassis, which is then fixed in a solid block of aluminium.

This is a pure CD transport, outputting signal only in digital form via optical and coaxial S/PDIF and balanced AES/EBU on an XLR. In addition, when used with a suitable DAC – such as the one we have here – the RS2 T can be connected using its 'I2S plus masterclock' output, which uses an HDMI connector: rather than sending data and digital control data as a single signal, as is the case in conventional digital audio transmission, I2S uses separate feeds for data, the word clock (which lets the receiver sort what's what in the incoming data) and the bit clock. It's the way data is transmitted inside players, hence 'Inter-Integrated Circuit Sound'.

The Pre Box RS2 Digital is just as clever. As well as the matching I2S input – which, despite being on an HDMI socket, isn't to HDMI standard, so can't take sound from your TV – it also has coaxial and two optical S/PDIF sockets and an AES/EBU input, plus a USB Type B asynchronous input for connection to a computer, over which it can accept data at up to 768kHz/32-bit and DSD512. It also offers user-selectable upsampling of lesser

formats to 384/352.8kHz and reclocking, MQA decoding (which could be useful if you use a TIDAL-capable network player) and a choice of seven digital filters and two analogue. Bluetooth is also provided, as are analogue inputs on RCA sockets or balanced XLRs, and the unit offers RCA/balanced outputs, plus a 'full size' 6.35mm headphone socket. A final intriguing option is the choice of solid state or valve-powered analogue outputs: as mentioned, these can be used at variable level straight into power amplification, or at a set level into a conventional pre-amp or integrated amp.

PERFORMANCE

With all that flexibility built into the Pre Box RS2 Digital, there's plenty with which to experiment but also plenty to confuse if one allows it. The good news is that there's no such thing as the right configuration here, only the one able to give the listener his or her preferred sound. After a long period of fiddling with the settings, I was still unable to find one I found preferable across all recordings, so I gave up with the small stuff and decided instead to concentrate on the big thing, which is how good this two-box player sounds, almost irrespective of the settings chosen.

That applies whether using it as intended, with the DAC fed from the transport, or with a computer fed in through the USB input to play higher-quality files. In the latter configuration I found myself marvelling at just how good high-DSD files could sound, courtesy of some releases from the specialist website NativeDSD. There's scale and solidity, plus an occasionally jaw-dropping openness, to recordings like this played through a DAC as accomplished as the Pro-Ject; but just as impressive is the way this two-box combination brings a version of the same qualities to CDs.

Not only does it breathe new life into familiar recordings but it manages to do so without that hyper-detailed effect that makes less-than-perfect mastering jobs sound excessively raw and brittle. And that's not just a matter of dialling in the valve output stage to bring a spot of lushness to the party: instead the Pro-Ject pairing sounds just as convincing whichever output stage is chosen, but perhaps just a

Or you could try ...

Audiolab 6000CDT

Two-box CD players have somewhat fallen out of fashion, at least in the mass market, but Audiolab has bucked that trend with its latest 6000 series. Making use of the digital conversion in its integrated amplifiers, it offers the 6000CDT, a pure digital transport, enabling it to keep the price down and avoid duplication of circuitry. For more information see audiolab.co.uk.



Quad Artera

Quad takes a different approach for its Artera range, with its Play+ model combining the functions of CD player, DAC and pre-amp, complete with a USB input able to handle files at up to 384kHz/32-bit and DSD256. Matching the striking styling of the Play+, the Artera Stereo power amplifier allows a compact two-box playback/amplification system to be assembled. See more at quad-hifi.co.uk.




Marantz ND8006

Finally, if you want an affordable but comprehensive digital player solution, the 'do-it-all' Marantz ND8006 combines CD player, DAC and network audio in one slimline box. It can also play music from a computer or memory devices via its USB inputs, and has both HEOS multiroom and voice control built in. Details at marantz.co.uk.



smidge smoother and warmer when the valves are in use. To my ears, the slightly sharper focus of the solid state output stage is preferable; your taste may vary.

And focus is there in abundance, along with that combination of mellifluous fluidity and weight, power and dynamics. By any standards this is a remarkable CD-playing package, and its arrival at this stage of the silver disc's history will be a cause for celebration for many. 

● REVIEW LYPERTEK TEVI

In-ear comfort and quality

These 'true wireless' earphones sound excellent, have extended battery life, are beautifully made and are simple to use – and best of all, they're very affordable

As those who listen to music on the move will know, there are two kinds of wireless earphones. All connect to a mobile phone, computer or digital music player using Bluetooth – but some are more wireless than others.

At the affordable end of the market, the in-ear pieces are often connected to a neckband or other device containing the wireless electronics and the rechargeable battery powering the whole system; true wireless earphones, with nothing but radio signals connecting the earpiece to the player in your pocket, tend to be on the expensive side. Apple's AirPods, for example, are £159 with their standard charging case or £40 more with the wireless charging version, while Sony's WF-1000MX3 model will cost you around £200 (although they do include noise-cancelling technology).

The beauty of designs such as this is that everything is built into the little earpiece you pop into your ear

Inevitably there are a lot of not very good budget models out there, all trying to jump on this 'true wireless' bandwagon, but now, courtesy of the well-known distributor KS Distribution and its hifiheadphones.co.uk mail order site, comes a pair of wireless earphones with a very sensible price plus high-quality design and build – and they're more than good enough to shake up some of the big-ticket market leaders.

Selling at £99, the Lypertek Tevi is part of a range of earphones from this manufacturer and comes complete with a pocket-size case covered in a grey tweed-effect fabric. Others in the line-up include the Bevi and Mevi, which are wired earphones; the range is made in China, and finished and packaged to a very high standard.

The beauty of designs such as this is that everything – wireless circuitry, amplification, controls and the battery to power it all – is built into the little earpiece you pop into your ear. That's a pretty impressive feat of miniaturisation, especially when you consider how small and light the company has made the earpieces, but don't think this means



LYPERTEK TEVI

Type Wireless earphones

Price £99

Drivers 6mm graphene

Bluetooth 5.0 with aptX

Battery life 10 hours earpieces, 70 hours with charging case

Accessories supplied USB charging cable, choice of eartips

Dimensions 3.5x1.3x2cm (earphones); 8.5x4.5x4cm (charging case)

lypertek.com

ksdistribution.co.uk

hifiheadphones.co.uk

performance has been compromised along the way. As one soon discovers when using the Tevi, these little earphones are both highly practical and capable of excellent performance.

PERFORMANCE

The earpieces are charged in the compact carrying case, which comes with a USB A-to-USB C cable to connect to a computer or a phone charger, and give around 10 hours' use from a single charge, depending on volume level. But there's a little more to it than that, in that the case itself has a built-in rechargeable battery, holding enough power to replenish the earphones six times, meaning you can have up to 70 hours' use before you need to find something to recharge the system. In use, those claims were certainly borne out: I didn't embark on any long-haul travel during the review period but in day-to-day


use I only needed to recharge the case every week or so.

Magnets hold the earpieces in place when charging, and they turn off and go into charging mode when inserted into the case, powering up again when they're removed. Pairing with the music-playing device is also simple, the two earpieces connecting as 'Tevi-L' and 'Tevi-R', and after that operation of your device is via sequences of presses on the single buttons on the end of each earpiece.

These take a little learning – for example, skipping to the next track requires three presses on the right earpiece and going back a track three on the left, while volume up/down is handled by double presses – but after a short while the process becomes intuitive, as does answering, rejecting and ending calls when the Tevi is used with a phone. A microphone is fitted in each earpiece for phone use, while voice prompts confirm set-up, Bluetooth pairing and so on.

The earpieces are comfortable, too. They come with silicone tips fitted, plus a choice of sizes of foam eartips, but I found I stuck with the silicones, which kept the earpieces pretty firmly in place, even though I must admit I didn't indulge in any strenuous activity with them in use. There's no noise-cancelling here but the eartips fit snugly enough in the ear to provide decent passive isolation from external sound.

Inside the little earpieces, the Tevi has Bluetooth 5.0 with aptX and AAC codecs and uses tiny 6mm graphene drivers to deliver the sound. The earpiece housings are IPX7 waterproof, meaning they can be immersed in up to a metre of water for 30 minutes – in other words, they'll keep on working if it rains or you decide to work up a sweat.

Best of all, though, is that these inexpensive earphones sound very good indeed, with a fine balance between weight and detail delivering a truly immersive listening experience. They'll go more than loud enough to satisfy those who like their music on the exciting side, and offer sufficiently low levels of leakage, even when playing hard, not to annoy those around the listener. The temptation to hum, sing along or air-conduct you'll have to sort out for yourself ... 

● ESSAY

An inspiration for a whole industry

The recent death of Ken Ishiwata has robbed the hi-fi world of an ambassador whose influence went way beyond the company with which he was associated

We all have influences – those people who do more than simply inspire but have the ability to change the way we think. Mine were an enthusiastic English teacher who reassured me that I could write for a living, a friend of the family who developed in me an understanding of music – and Ken Ishiwata, who passed away, aged 72, just before the end of 2019.

A lot has already been written about Ken, who was born in Japan but played a major part in the development of the European audio industry for more than four decades. His official job description for the latter part of that time was Brand Ambassador for Marantz – a title he took on when someone up the corporate chain decided he really ought to have something on his business card beyond ‘Ken Ishiwata, Marantz’.

In the modern social media world, a brand ambassador is usually nothing more than a celebrity or online ‘influencer’ signed up to wear, drive or drink a particular product, but that couldn’t be further from what Ken – although admittedly a hi-fi industry celebrity – did for Marantz, and indeed the whole audio industry. Not only was he instrumental in growing the brand in Europe, and developing the products to spur that growth, he also travelled extensively to open up new markets, notably giving Marantz a major presence in China, where it sponsored orchestral concerts shown on national television – and saw Ishiwata interviewed on TV chat shows!

I first encountered Ishiwata more than 25 years ago and was instantly inspired not only by his ability when it came to building superb-sounding audio products but also by his love of music. His demonstrations – whether at hi-fi shows, major events or just one-to-one in the excellent listening rooms he designed at various Marantz premises – were always a voyage of musical discovery. No predictable ‘audiophile’ selections for Ishiwata: you were as likely to hear a previously unknown orchestral recording as you were a 12-inch single of some half-remembered disco track.

Born as the LP age was dawning, he’d actually built his first amplifier – valve-



Marantz’s Ken Ishiwata, who has died at the age of 72

powered, of course, and mono – at the age of 10. No wonder he was one of only seven out of some 1500 entrants that year to pass the rigorous International First Class Radio Operating Engineer examination back at the start of his career, when he worked on ships, loving the travelling but finding life onboard rather dull.

Even before he was out of high school, Ken Ishiwata was already tuning the sound of Marantz products

And when it came to his early hi-fi influences, he always cited the acquisition by a friend’s father – ‘he was a real audiophile and had a wonderful listening room’ – of a Marantz pre-amplifier and the effect it had on the sound of the system in which it was used. ‘My friend’s father invited me round to hear a record by Julie London. I knew the disc, but as soon as it played, it was like Julie London was there. “Wow!” I said, “What did you change?” And he pointed to a gold fascia – it was the Marantz Model 7c pre-amp.’

Realising that such a piece of equipment was beyond the means of a high-school student, he did the obvious thing – well, the obvious thing for Ishiwata. He borrowed the precious product, opened it up and attempted to reproduce it for himself, learning in the process how substituting key components such as valves, resistors and capacitors could affect the sound. Not even out of high school, he was already tuning the sound of Marantz products.

Ishiwata was already with Marantz when the company, then owned by Philips, began making CD players. ‘That was another great opportunity for me. I had been working with analogue audio until then, and didn’t know anything about digital. I learnt so much from the Philips engineers.’

And around this time Ishiwata was contacted by the founder of the company, Saul B Marantz, who had started in a similar way, removing the radio from his 1940 Mercury car, moving it into his home in a New York suburb and improving it in the process of getting it to work.

Marantz, by then in his seventies, said to Ishiwata: ‘I have done as much as I can with mono and stereo LPs; now it’s your turn to do something with compact disc.’

The Ishiwata-tuned editions of Marantz players came about almost by accident: just a few years after the launch of CD, Marantz had a stockpile of its CD-45 players. These used Philips’ 4x oversampling 14-bit Continuous Calibration technology at a time when Japanese rivals were promoting their use of 16-bit. Consumers automatically assumed that 16 was better than 14. ‘We had this huge stock of 14-bit players, and they weren’t selling. Some of my colleagues wanted to dump them on the market for just £100 each but I said, ‘We’re not going to do that’. Instead I spent just £8 apiece tuning them, then took the tuned models out to reviewers and retailers as “the most musical CD player in the world”.’

For all that, he was still working in the background, until a decision was taken that the company needed a personality around whom its products could be marketed. Ishiwata took some persuading but eventually the first KI-Signature model was launched, the CD-63 MkII KI Signature sharing the model designation of the company’s first player of 1982.

In 2018 Marantz held an event to mark Ishiwata’s 40th anniversary with the company, launching the KI Ruby player and amplifier in celebration. Speaking at the event, the always dapper Ishiwata, then 71, wore one of his signature custom-made jackets, in gold. As he pointed out, it was chosen so he’d be ready for his 50th anniversary with the company. **G**

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NOTES & LETTERS

The Sinfonia of London and HMV • Strauss in-store • Compton Mackenzie's gramophone

Write to us at Gramophone, Mark Allen Group, St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB or gramophone@markallengroup.com

Sinfonia of London backstory

One of your correspondents, Reg Snow, asks for information about Sir John Barbirolli's HMV recording with the Sinfonia of London, 'English String Music' – works by Elgar and Vaughan Williams (January, page 124).

The Sinfonia was an orchestra formed in the 1950s by breakaway members of the London Symphony Orchestra who wanted to concentrate on the lucrative business of recording film soundtracks. It included some distinguished names: the lead oboist was Léon Goossens and Colin Davis made his first recordings with the orchestra. As well as recording a great many film soundtracks, the orchestra became the house ensemble of the World Record Club and made many recordings for that organisation, mostly of fairly standard repertoire.

At the time of the Elgar/VW recordings, the World Record Club had recently been taken over by EMI, so there might have been contractual obligations that had to be fulfilled, which would explain EMI's choice of orchestra.

Incidentally, although the recording is now justifiably looked upon as a classic, it received rather more mixed reviews at the time of issue: I remember one reviewer describing it as the orchestra 'swimming strongly through a sea of surging treacle'!

David Leonard
Binsted, Hants

You may also be interested in our cover story interview with John Wilson on page 14 – Ed

Strauss on the shop floor

No doubt money was an inducement to Richard Strauss to perform his *Symphonia domestica* in a New York department store in 1904 (Hugo Shirley's Collection, December, page 138), but why has no one recognised in more than a century of affected outrage since this famous incident that it was really also an excellent joke?

John Stone
London N22

Our first Editor's gramophone

The image of Compton Mackenzie grappling with his gramophone (January, page 16) shows him with his EM Ginn Expert Senior and 10a soundbox in the early 1930s – he had long ago disposed

Letter of the Month

Vladimir Horowitz, the great programmer



Horowitz: an ability to educate and entertain

Michelle Assay's insightful article 'Horowitz: Our Contemporary' (December, page 14) was brilliant, engaging and invaluable for her survey of the criticism to date on Horowitz and one of few such articles I have read.

While I did not have the opportunity to hear Horowitz in concert, what I feel – at least from the recordings – was that Horowitz's greatest contribution to the art of piano playing was his thoughtful and incredibly varied programming for each of his recitals. His uncanny ability to both educate and entertain

is evident in Sony Classical's two sets of Horowitz's complete recitals ('Horowitz Live at Carnegie Hall' and 'Horowitz: The Unreleased Recitals 1966-83'). Listening through each of the recitals complete gives one a sense both of the entertainment and high artistic experience Horowitz's audiences must have received. I read somewhere that Horowitz's credo to programming was 'contrast, contrast, contrast'. This is evident in each of his recitals. Who these days plays Schumann's Sonata No 3, Mozart's Sonata, K333, and Prokofiev's Seventh Sonata in the first half, then, in the second, a Chopin group and, to end, Liszt's Sixth Rhapsody (his March 5, 1951 recital)?

It must be borne in mind that composers such as Scriabin, Rachmaninov and Prokofiev were alive when Horowitz was, and in that sense he was playing the music of living composers of his time together with those of the dead. Horowitz's feel for pacing a concert programme, of ensuring the audience enjoyed both high art and great entertainment, was unerring. I doubt there are more than two or three pianists today who have Horowitz's ability to connect with an audience with such great sophistication.

Phan Ming Yen
Singapore

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of the Aeolian-Vocalion and moved on to better things.

He gave a glowing endorsement of his new machine in the June 1931 issue: 'Most of my loquacity about vocal records has been due to reading Mr Herman Klein's delightful book and the brochure

of Mr Dawson Freer, but some of it has been due to the pleasure I have been getting from my Senior Expert which Mr EM Ginn sent all the way up to the North by car. The care which Mr Ginn has devoted to obtaining the finest reproduction by fibre needles has

proved a boon when I have been trying over and over again these vocal records. Amplification has made steel reproduction almost impossible to endure. I should be inclined to sing with Captain Macheath, “How happy could I be with either, were t’other dear charmer away,” were I not more happy to have both dear charmers in the shape of the Senior Expert and the EMG Mark 10a. Not the least remarkable achievement of Mr Ginn with the Senior Expert is the way he has somehow managed to produce a horn which gives equally good results in a large, lofty room and in a low, narrow room. And even Mr Ginn might have blushed to hear the compliments his Senior Expert has been getting in the North.’

Jolyon Hudson, via email

Klemperer’s other Fidelio

As one who was privileged to be able to attend the original production with Otto Klemperer at the helm, may I join with Simon Callow (‘My Beethoven’, January, page 130) in favouring the live recording made in Covent Garden (available on Testament, 7/15) over

the EMI version. Why the producer Walter Legge chose the different cast members for his commercial recording I really do not know, but after a lifetime chasing performances and 14 different recordings I find the Klemperer cast to be the finest. Granted it is a live recording in mono (and that sonically there are many superior-sounding versions) but the performance from the Opera House has never been bettered. I’d suggest that it should be placed alongside Artur Schnabel’s recording of the piano sonatas for classic status.

Gerald Funnell

Hastings, East Sussex

Editorial note

In his review of Lucy Parham’s ‘I, Clara’ (January, page 70), Adrian Edwards writes that ‘the first movement of the [Schumann] Sonata in G minor, phrased as if by a singer, with a touch of rubato and dextrous fingerwork, makes one yearn for a complete recording’. In fact, there is a 2007 recording of the complete sonata by Parham, made for ASV, now available to stream at Apple Music and Spotify.

OBITUARY

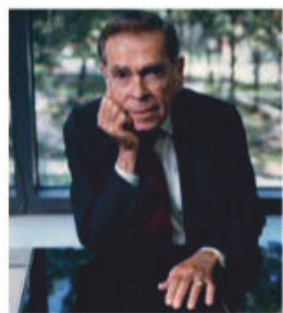
An American pianist who died weeks before he would have turned 100

ABBEY SIMON

Pianist and teacher

Born January 20, 1920

Died December 18, 2019



A pupil, alongside Jorge Bolet and Sidney Foster, of Josef Hofmann at Philadelphia’s Curtis Institute (which he entered on a scholarship aged eight), Abbey Simon also studied with Leopold Godowsky and Harold Bauer. In 1940 he won the Naumberg International Piano Competition which brought with it a recital at New York’s Town Hall. It launched an impressive career, heralded by the public and critics alike. Simon was known for his formidable virtuosity, but he was also elegant in the music of Chopin; reviewing a Vox-Turnabout recording of the Second and Third Piano Sonatas, Joan Chissell concluded: ‘In sum I would call it an American virtuoso’s Chopin, but a virtuoso with a generous heart.’

Following a successful European tour in 1949, Simon settled in Switzerland where he lived for a decade and

continued to visit regularly, though he also had a house in Houston. Among his teaching posts he was Cullen Distinguished Professor of Music in the Moores School of Music at the University of Houston (1977-2019). He also taught at Indiana University, Juilliard, Hunter College and the Manhattan School of Music, and gave masterclasses in many of the world’s leading conservatoires. He was a regular juror at leading piano events including the Van Cliburn, Leeds, Clara Haskill and Sydney competitions.

He recorded extensively, mainly for Vox and HMV. Reviewing an HMV album of the Liszt *Grandes études de Paganini*, Malcolm Macdonald wrote: ‘The Paganini originals – mostly solo violin caprices – explored pretty fully the resources of advanced string technique, and the Liszt transcriptions explore pretty fully the resources of advanced piano technique; but Simon is nowhere found lacking in this respect, and seldom, indeed, in any other. Here and there it may be possible to imagine a performance of greater delicacy, but it would scarcely be possible to imagine one of greater strength.’

NEXT MONTH MARCH 2020



Teodor Currentzis on Beethoven’s Fifth

As the charismatic, controversial conductor releases a recording of Beethoven’s Symphony No 5 on Sony Classical, he talks about his love of the whole process of recording

MTT’s farewell

As Michael Tilson Thomas steps down at San Francisco with a flurry of recordings reflecting the wide diversity of his repertoire, we talk to him about the relationship between the orchestra and its city

Dixit Dominus

In our Collection feature, Richard Wigmore explores the history of Handel’s early choral masterpiece on record

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




















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


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John Gilhooly

The Director of Wigmore Hall and Chairman of the RPS on his relationship with Beethoven

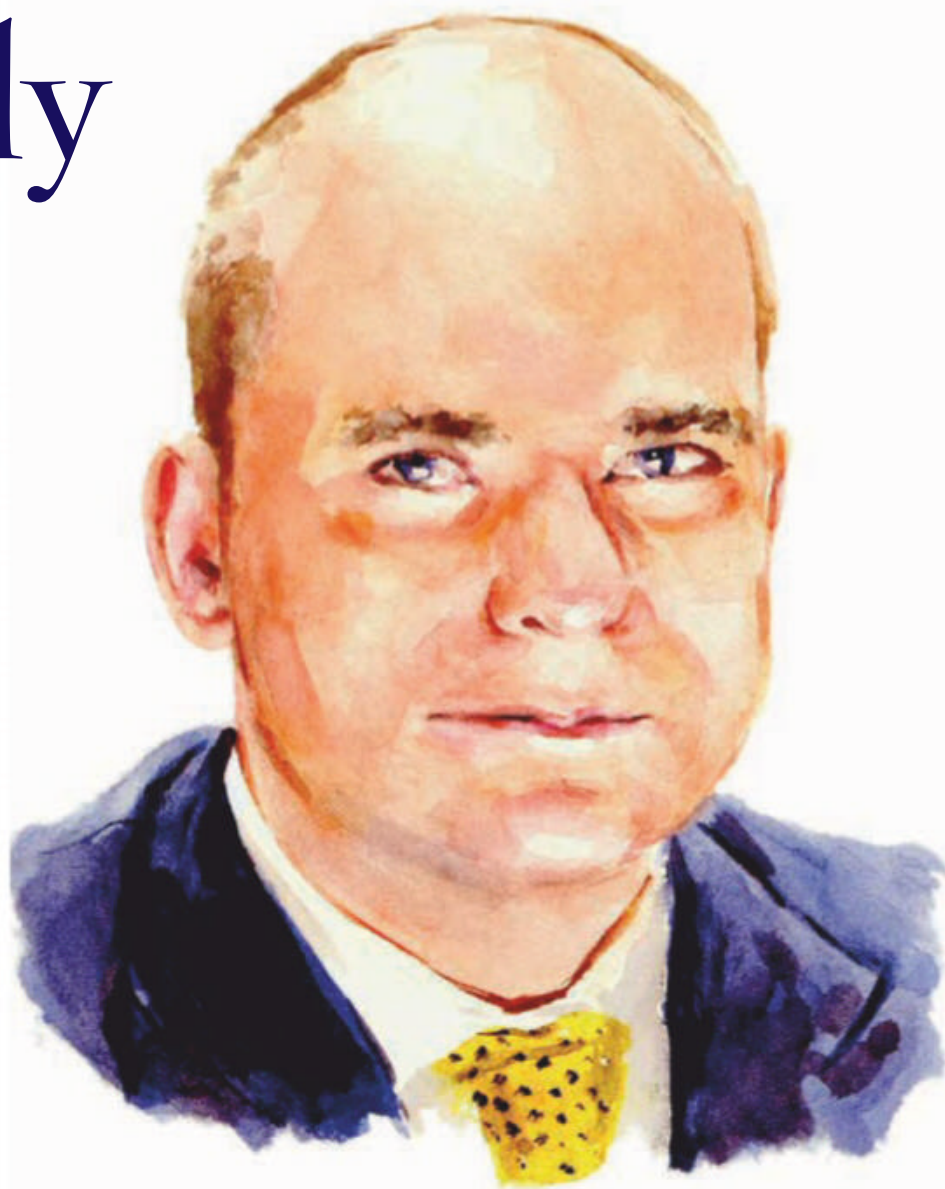
I was very lucky growing up in Limerick because there was a huge chamber music tradition. I went to a Catholic school, but the headmaster of the local Protestant school was called John Ruddock and he was very friendly with William Lyne [Director of Wigmore Hall for 36 years between 1966 and 2003]. So quite a few major artists, many from Eastern Europe, would come to Limerick to give their warm-up concert. I can remember the original Takács Quartet, András Schiff – when I was 11 – playing Beethoven in Limerick, and later Imogen Cooper and Wolfgang Holzmair. And John Ruddock loved doing chamber music, so I heard a lot of quartets and piano trios during those years when I was on the cusp of being a teenager.

We had a lot of music at home. All three siblings trained as singers, and the first Beethoven song I ever learnt was ‘In questa tomba oscura’ (there’s a wonderful recording from 1991 by Cecilia Bartoli and András Schiff). It’s a dreary poem, but it was very good for vocal line. (Incidentally, Dame Clara Butt’s gramophone recording was played at Wigmore Hall in 1927 at an event to mark the 100th anniversary of Beethoven’s death.) My teacher was Veronica Dunne – who’s still teaching 25 hours a week at the age of 94! – who insisted on *arie antiche*, then some of Beethoven’s Italian songs, and then we looked at *An die ferne Geliebte*, because she didn’t want us singing too many arias. At the time I wasn’t sure whether I was a tenor or baritone.

Beethoven’s music is part of the fabric of Wigmore Hall: Busoni played the Piano Sonata in E, Op 109, when the hall (then called Bechstein Hall) opened on May 31, 1901. I’ve heard piano sonata cycles by András Schiff (twice, tying in with those ECM recordings); Igor Levit has been the most recent; and we mustn’t forget Paul Lewis and Llŷr Williams – all equally memorable in their own ways. But my favourite recorded cycle is the Richard Goode from 1993 on Nonesuch. I constantly go back to that set.

When I ask a pianist to do a sonata cycle, I need to have the confidence that they’ll be able to sustain the quality throughout a season. It was huge risk when we did it with Igor, because he was still in his late twenties, but it totally paid off. Of course, what will be fascinating is what he will do in 20 years’ time. András Schiff did a series of audio lectures in 2004 about the sonatas, which we broadcast. They were pitched at students but quite honestly they’re perfect for anyone. And he still gets stopped at airports by youngsters who have listened to them, saying ‘Thank you so much!’

Beethoven is all around us and I suspect there are very few people in the Western world who haven’t been touched by his music, however tangentially. Late Beethoven – be it the string quartets or the piano sonatas – when in the hands of great musicians is something unique. I don’t think we’re meant to understand it. There’s always a struggle, *his* struggle, yet, in a way, this is music that reaches for the stars.



THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

Beethoven Piano Sonatas **Richard Goode**
Nonesuch

He never gets in the way of the music and just lets it speak. The late A major, Op 101, is absolutely wonderful, full of clarity and elegance, just like him.

With my Royal Philharmonic Society hat on, I'll never forget presenting the Gold Medal, considered to be one of the highest honours in music, to Nikolaus Harnoncourt in 2012 after a shattering performance of the *Missa solemnis* with the Concertgebouw Orchestra at the Barbican. Presenting him with the medal, which has the effigy of Beethoven on it, remains a really cherishable memory.

It cost the RPS £50 to commission the *Choral* Symphony and we're very proud of our involvement. What's very touching is that word got back to London that the composer, because of hearing impairment, was living in poverty. The RPS organised a collection among music lovers and they sent him £100. In 1870, to commemorate 100 years since his birth, a bust of Beethoven was created in Vienna and sent to the RPS to thank them. And sometimes it joins the musicians on stage for major events. It's been on stage at the Proms for the *Choral* Symphony a few times and it visited Wigmore Hall for our Beethoven weekend.

I keep going back to Otto Klemperer's 1957 recording of the *Choral* with the Philharmonia, to the finale in particular. Here we are, 12 years after the end of the war, and here is this German Jew leading a call for brotherhood. What Klemperer does is incredible. And here we are again with a fractured Europe, the rise of the far right, anti-Semitism ... Beethoven's message remains as strong, and vital, as ever. **G**

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Artur Pizarro performs Poulenc's Piano Concerto with the Bamberger Symphoniker directed by Thomas Rösner, alongside Poulenc's Sinfonietta and two rare, glittering gems by Koechlin.

Following the success of Artur Pizarro's complete Rachmaninoff recordings on Odradek, hailed in Gramophone Magazine as "courageous and poetic", the Portuguese pianist returns with Poulenc's jaunty Piano Concerto. The album also features Poulenc's colourful *Sinfonietta* and two Koechlin tone poems, of which *Sur les flots lointains* uses a melody by American composer Catherine Murphy Urner.

The Bamberger Symphoniker was lauded for its BBC Proms 2019 performance: "stunning... idiomatic, impassioned, blazing with energy and power..." (The Times). This release is a coproduction with Bayerischer Rundfunk.



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